

William R. Bosley
August 25, 1839 – November 15, 1922
By Mark R. Terry

William R. Bosley was born on August 25, 1839 to Philip and Nancy (Harris) Bosley in Hampshire County, Virginia. Soon thereafter the family moved to Hardy County and began subsistence farming in the hills between Old Fields and Williamsport. William was the firstborn of eight children, but nothing is known of his childhood.

By 1860 William was listed in the Jacob Vanmeter household as a laborer. The Vanmeter Clan lived close to Moorefield, the county seat, and were wealthy landowners. In the spring of 1861, when Virginia voted to secede, many young men went to town to enlist. William was one of them, signing up on June 2 to be a member of the “Hardy Blues”, the first Confederate company to be sworn into service from Hardy County. Soon, the “Blues” were marching southward to help stop the incursion by Federals under Major General George B. McClellan. At Huttonsville, Virginia, the Hardy Blues were designated Company H and consolidated with nine other companies on July 1st to form the 25th Virginia Infantry, under the command of Lt. Col. Jonathan M. Heck.

At the Battle of Rich Mountain on July 11, 1861, Company H or at least a portion of them were posted near the Hart House and Farm and fought against the overwhelming Federal force that had snaked its way to the position. It is not known whether William R. Bosley was among that group. But in any case, Bosley was among the 387 enlisted Confederate soldiers surrendered by Lt. Col. John Pegram to McClellan’s forces on July 13 at Beverly. On the 17th, all of the surrendered Rebels were “paroled”, meaning that even though they were not taken captive, they were under oath not to take up arms unless they were “properly exchanged”. William’s parole documents give his description: Age 22, Height, 5 feet, 10 inches, dark complexion, dark hair and dark eyes [these are all traits of the Bosley line].

While the war went on, William and the other paroled men sat it out, waiting for the authorities to determine what their new assignment would be. Finally after over a year of being in limbo, Bosley was “exchanged” on August 16, 1862. By this time, the 25th Virginia had reorganized with men taken from other units beside the paroled men, and William found himself without a unit. In the fall of 1862, a new partisan organization under Col. John Imboden was formed. In early 1863, the various companies were re-organized into three separate entities- the 62nd Virginia Mounted Infantry, the 18th Virginia Cavalry and McClanahan’s Virginia Battery of Artillery. Placed in overall command, Imboden was made a Brigadier General. The organization was dubbed the “Northwestern Brigade”. The 62nd was an unusual outfit. Mounted on horses whenever possible, the regiment fought like dragoons, riding horses to get into position, then dismounting to fight on foot. They were officially organized on January 28, 1863 and the men of Company H in the old 25th were now Company B of the 62nd! William was made 1st Corporal of his company. On April 1, 1863, he was further promoted to 4th Sergeant. Now came a time of active campaigning, as the 62nd engaged in the Jones-Imboden Raid of April/May, 1863. This was followed by cooperation with the Army of Northern Virginia as they marched north to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Imboden’s troops guarded the rear of Lee’s army northward, and the ambulance train on the retreat to the south. Along with a cobbled together force, they held off

marauding Yankee cavalry at Williamsport, Maryland on July 6, allowing the army to use it later as one of their crossing points to return to the Old Dominion.

After a time of relative rest, the spring of 1864 saw a renewed Federal offensive under their new overall military commander, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. He planned a coordinated offensive using a force under U.S. General Franz Sigel to move up the Valley while he attacked Lee's force head on. Imboden's Brigade fought a delaying action until more units under Gen. John C. Breckinridge could be gathered to stop Sigel. The main forces met at New Market, Virginia, where they fought on May 15, 1864. This battle is mostly remembered for the valor of the young VMI Cadets- taken from their studies in Lexington- helped hold the middle of the Confederate line. However, the unsung heroes of the battle were the 62nd Virginia, who, fighting as infantry, lost the most casualties on the Southern side. With Sigel falling back after his loss at New Market, Lee now asked Breckinridge to reinforce him. Several regiments were released, including the 62nd, for service with the Army of Northern Virginia. They arrived in time to fight in the Battle of Cold Harbor, June 3, 1864, in which their brigade helped hold off the bloody frontal assaults of the Army of the Potomac. With the front briefly stalemated, General Jubal Early was ordered to the Valley to counter a renewed threat by the Federals. Gen. David Hunter had taken over from Sigel and launched a furious "scorched earth" offensive, including burning VMI in Lexington. He was stopped at Lynchburg by Early's Second Corps, including the 62nd, and with the Valley clear, General Early went on the offensive all the way to the gates of Washington City itself! William was likely with them all this time.

Finally, General Phil Sheridan was given the 6th Corps and a large force of cavalry with orders from Grant to "clear the Valley" of Rebels. The first major battle of Sheridan's campaign proved to be William's last. On September 19, 1864, during the 3rd Battle of Winchester, in fighting near the left flank of the Confederate line, William was wounded by a "round ball" on the inner side of the left leg, just above the ankle. He was captured by the Yankees and sent to a field hospital in Winchester, where his wound was treated. On October 19th, he was sent to the General Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, where it was noted he was "improved". After further treatment at a third hospital in Baltimore, he was discharged with orders to be sent to Point Lookout Prison in Southern Maryland.

It was here that Providence intervened. Prisoner exchanges had been halted by Gen. Grant, forcing both sides to keep prisoners they had captured. Prisons overflowed with POWs, forcing overcrowding and horrible conditions both North and South. It looked as if William R. Bosley would be a prisoner for the duration. However, the outcry from Northern families forced the government to do something to provide relief for their men in Southern hands, and a one-time exchange of wounded and sick prisoners was adopted. William came out of the hospital on October 26th, and just three days later was on board a ship heading to Georgia to be exchanged! He was among 3,022 other POWs in a fleet of five ships heading toward Savannah. After arriving on November 11th, the prisoners were exchanged on the 15th at Venus Point, at the mouth of the Savannah River and returned to Confederate lines. Unfortunately, William's service record ends here, so what he did in the war beyond that is unknown. But with Gen. Sherman's Army bearing down on Savannah, one wonders what became of the ex-POWs that were now "back home".

After the war, for many veterans of the South, there was little or nothing to come home to. Many of them headed west to start their lives anew. William was among them, and he next surfaced in Illinois, where records show that he married Mary Ann Washburn, an Indiana native, on December 8, 1867 at Tremont, Illinois. In 1876, he and Mary moved to Kansas, ending up in the town of Ellis in the central part of the state. Not able to have children, they adopted a young girl in the mid-1880's and named her "Daisy". The Bosleys lived in Ellis the rest of their lives, with William farming to support the family. Daisy grew up, married and moved to Kansas City, Kansas. Mary died on April 19, 1921 at the age of 75. After that, William was never the same. He moved away from Ellis to be with his daughter's family in Kansas City. He died on November 15, 1922. His obituary states that "due to grief, his mind became impaired, accompanied by a marked physical decline until death claimed him". William was buried by Mary's side in Mt. Hope Cemetery, in Ellis, Kansas. He was 83 at the time of his death and lived a very long and full life.

There is only one known photograph of William R. Bosley. In it, he is sitting in a chair outside his apparent residence, with his arms and legs crossed. On the reverse was written this note: *"Obe, this is Bro.[ther] Will. Dr. and Edith was out there two years ago and Edith taken a it. I have thought I would send you one ever since but put it off. He was very feable[sic] and lame. We have not heard from him since. Think I will write but do not get to write to you- work all the time.*

Love to all, Eliza"

Given what was written in his obituary, I am thinking that the photograph was taken shortly before William's death. "Obe" was Philip Obed Bosley, a younger brother of William. The note on the back of the photo was written by Ann Eliza Bosley (1860-1934), William's youngest sister. Eliza moved to Missouri after 1880 and married Charles Feindel in 1884. The photo was taken by Ann Eliza's daughter Edith (Feindel) Nickson, who was married to Dr. Charles Nickson.

My connection to William is through another sister of his- Ada M. Bosley. Ada is my Great-Great Grandmother. She became pregnant out of wedlock towards the end of the war and gave birth to a daughter, Lucy Catherine Bosley, on April 12, 1865, just two days before Lincoln was shot. Later, Lucy married John S. Tharp, the firstborn son of another Confederate Veteran, my Great-Great Grandfather, William Braxton Tharp- but that is another story.