

## Henry Claiborne “Clay” Adams, 43<sup>rd</sup> Virginia Cavalry

Henry Claiborne Adams was enlisted in Company B on October 1, 1863 by Captain William R. Smith at Scuffleburg, Fauquier County, Virginia.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, he had served, in Captain Turner Ashby’s Mountain Rangers in Fauquier County.<sup>2</sup> He is shown as “Present” on the 43<sup>rd</sup> Virginia Cavalry muster roll for December 1863.<sup>3</sup> Adams was involved in the July 4 and July 5, 1864 raids on Point-of-Rocks, Maryland.<sup>4</sup> He was mortally wounded September 4, 1864 in the “Gold’s Farm” fight with the 6<sup>th</sup> New York Cavalry near Berryville, Virginia. Clay Adams died January 7, 1865 at “Liberty Hill”, which was the home of Elizabeth O’Rear and south of Ashby’s Gap, Clarke County, Virginia. He was buried there the next day in the burying ground by the house.<sup>5</sup>

Henry Claiborne Adams was born in 1834 near Paris, Fauquier County, Virginia, the son of Benjamin Adams and Mary Marshall. At the outbreak of the Civil War, his father was proprietor of Ashby’s Tavern on the East End of Main Street in Paris.<sup>6</sup> Clay Adams had been exempt from military service by virtue of being deaf.<sup>7</sup> However, he may have had more than an active interest in continuing his military career as evidenced by his going to the camp of the 8<sup>th</sup> Virginia Infantry in August 1861 with neighbor Melbourne Robinson.<sup>8</sup> In any case, he was accepted into the 43<sup>rd</sup> in the fall of 1863. When Adams was mortally wounded in the Gold’s Farm fight, he was paralyzed from the waist down. He was taken to a neighbor’s house. That night, Rangers John Russell, Sydnor Ferguson and two others returned across the Shenandoah River and carried Adams back to his father’s home in Paris.<sup>9</sup> His death was lamented by all that knew him. Ranger J. Marshall Crawford wrote that Adams “was as brave a soldier as ever drew a saber.” and that he “fought with a vim that would have been creditable to the heroes of old.”<sup>10</sup> Ranger James J. Williamson wrote that Adams “proved a brave and faithful soldier”<sup>11</sup> A memorial service was held on April 30, 1865 in the Methodist Church at Paris. The services were conducted by the Reverend Thaddeus Herndon. An unusually large crowd including many Rebel soldiers attended the service.<sup>12</sup>

**Editor’s Comments:** There is some evidence that Clay Adams was mortally wounded by “friendly fire”.<sup>13</sup> There are, in fact, a number of instances involving the wounding and deaths of rangers in which “friendly fire” could have been the cause. This should be no surprise given the nature of the engagements and the relative firepower of the two combatants. Union cavalrymen carried, in many cases, only a single shot carbine and a saber. Mosby’s Rangers often carried several 6-shot Colt’s Revolvers (and no saber in most cases). In a close, hand-to-hand combat situation, the Rangers would put considerably more lead into an engagement than their adversary, the result being that, sometimes, stray bullets would find a friendly mark. This may have been what happened to Clay Adams.

Let us never forget the sacrifice of Henry Claiborne Adams.

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<sup>1</sup> National Archives, Washington D.C., Compiled Military Service Records for soldiers serving in the 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Virginia Partisan Rangers, Microfilm #324, Roll #208, record #8.

<sup>2</sup> Ramey, Emily G and Gott, John K, “The Years of Anguish – Fauquier County, Virginia, 1861-1865”, XXII.

<sup>3</sup> National Archives, Washington DC, Compiled Military Service Records for soldiers serving in the 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, Virginia Partisan Rangers, Microfilm #324, Roll #208, record #8.

<sup>4</sup> Munson, John W., “Reminiscences of a Mosby Guerilla”, page 99.

<sup>5</sup> Mann, Charles H., “Liberty Hill – The Story of a House and its People”, page 18.

<sup>6</sup> 1860 Federal Census, Fauquier County, Virginia, Series M653, Roll 1344, page 9, enumeration #75.

<sup>7</sup> Williamson, James J., “Mosby’s Rangers,” 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. page 225.

<sup>8</sup> Ramey, Emily G and Gott, John K, “The Years of Anguish – Fauquier County, Virginia, 1861-1865”, page 103-4.

<sup>9</sup> Crawford, J. Marshall, “Mosby and His Men”, pages 256-7.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Williamson, James J., “Mosby’s Rangers,” page 225.

<sup>12</sup> Baird, Nancy Chappelle, “Journals of Amanda Virginia Edmonds – Lass of the Mosby Confederacy 1859-1867”, page 223.

<sup>13</sup> Mann, Charles H., “Liberty Hill – The Story of a House and its People”, page 18.