

Basil R. and William Alexander, 43rd Virginia Cavalry

Basil R. Alexander was born about 1838 in Loudoun County, Virginia, the son of William and Elizabeth Alexander. A younger brother, William, was born about 1840, also in Loudoun County. In 1860, the Alexander family was residing near Belmont, located about four miles southeast of Leesburg, Virginia.¹

When the Civil War broke out, Basil R. Alexander enlisted on April 25, 1861 in Ball's Fairfax Cavalry, which was later re-organized as Company F, 5th Virginia Cavalry and even later as Company I, 11th Virginia Cavalry. His physical characteristics in April 1861 were listed as: height, 5'-3"; complexion, fair; hair, dark; eyes, blue. He appears on a muster roll for the period 1-1-63 to 2-28-63 as "absent – POW".² The details of his capture, imprisonment and exchange are unknown. Upon his release from prison, he did not return to his old cavalry regiment but chose to join the 43rd Virginia Cavalry.³

William Alexander enlisted on June 19, 1861 in Company I, 8th Virginia Infantry at Mt. Gilead, Loudoun County, Virginia. He was detailed as a cook in May 1863. He appears as AWOL on the July 1863 muster roll.⁴ It is believed he had joined his brother who was serving in Mosby's Command.

On November 20, 1863, a 300-man force of Union cavalry led by Colonel Charles Russell Lowell of the 2nd Massachusetts Cavalry Regiment, came to "Mosby's Confederacy" with the intent of "capturing guerillas". They were guided by Alexander "Yankee" Davis and recent deserter from the 43rd, Charles Binns. The Union Cavalry found success that night and early the next day in the area between Middleburg and Mountville in Loudoun County.⁵ According to Old Capital Prison records, 24 soldiers and citizens were captured. Of the total, twelve indicated affiliations with "Mosby's Battalion".⁶ Six indicated membership in other Confederate units although some of them were carrying passes from Mosby.⁷

Both Basil R. and William Alexander were captured by the Federal raiding party near Mountville in southern Loudoun County. Also captured was a third Alexander brother, David, who was absent from the 11th Virginia Cavalry, serving with Mosby's Command. Basil Alexander indicated affiliation with the 11th Virginia Cavalry while William noted his unit as being the 8th Virginia Infantry. It is believed that most of the rangers including the Alexander brothers were captured at their homes or boarding places. In the case of the Alexander brothers, they were likely boarding in the area as their home in Belmont was outside the boundaries of "Mosby's Confederacy".⁸

The three Alexander brothers were received at Old Capital Prison on November 24, 1863 and transferred to Point Lookout (Maryland) Federal Prison on February 3, 1864.⁹ Basil R. Alexander died on August 18, 1864 of unknown causes and was buried in the prison cemetery. William Alexander died ten days later on August 28, 1864 from acute diarrhea.¹⁰ He was likely also buried in the prison cemetery although there is no record of his burial location or status.

Editor's Comments: There are no original sources stating William Alexander's affiliation with the 43rd Virginia Cavalry at the time of his capture. However, by virtue of the facts that he 1) was captured with his two brothers and others who were known members of Mosby's Command; 2) was boarding inside the boundaries of "Mosby's Confederacy" and not at his home near Belmont; and 3) was AWOL from his regular unit for several months, strongly suggests he had been serving unofficially with the 43rd Virginia Cavalry during the period prior to his capture. Loudoun County, Virginia historian, John E. Divine, apparently came to the same conclusion when he authored the biography of the 8th Virginia Infantry Regiment. He noted in the roster for William Alexander that he was "captured 11/20/63 near Mountsville with Mosby's men".¹¹ Additionally, in a listing of "Loudoun County's Confederate Dead", published in a Leesburg, Virginia newspaper in 1906, both Basil R. and William Alexander are listed as belonging to "Mosby's Battalion".¹²

The State of Maryland erected an 85' tall monument at Point Lookout Prison in memory of the Confederate Soldiers who died there. At the base of the monument are tablets listing those

soldier's names in alphabetical order. Basil R. Alexander's name was incorrectly listed as "Alexander, B. I, 2 Va. Cav". William Alexander's name was mistakenly omitted from the monument.¹³

Let us never forget the sacrifice of Basil R. and William Alexander.

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¹ National Archives, Washington DC, 1840 Federal Census, Loudoun County, Virginia, Series T5, Roll 182, page 140; 1850 Federal Census, Loudoun County, Virginia, Series M432, Roll 957, page 322B; 1860 Federal Census, Loudoun County, Virginia, Series M653, Roll 1359, page 349.

² Driver, Robert J., Jr. "5th Virginia Cavalry". Lynchburg, Virginia.: H. E. Howard, Inc., 1997, page 178.

³ Williamson, James J. "Mosby's Rangers". 2nd Edition. New York, New York.: Sturgis & Walton Company, 1909, page 540.

⁴ Divine, John E. "8th Virginia Infantry". 2nd Edition. Lynchburg, Virginia.: H. E. Howard, Inc., 1983, page 53.

⁵ "War of the Rebellion – Official Records – Union and Confederate Armies," Series I, Volume XXIX, No. 1, page 658, "November 18-23, 1863. – Reconnaissance from Vienna toward the Blue Ridge Mountains, Va. Report of Col. Charles R. Lowell, Jr., 2nd Massachusetts Cavalry".

⁶ National Archives, Washington DC, Record Group 109, War Dept. Collection of Confederate Records, Microfilm M598, Selected Records of the War Department Relating to Confederate Prisoners of War, 1861-1865, Old Capital Prison Register.

⁷ Ibid; 'War of the Rebellion". page 658.

⁸ Williamson, page 175.

⁹ Driver, page 178; National Archives, Compiled Service Records, 43rd Virginia Battalion, Record #14.

¹⁰ Driver, page 178.

¹¹ Divine, page 58.

¹² Leesburg, Virginia, "The Record". April 6, 1906.

¹³ Point Lookout Prison Monument, Point Lookout, Maryland.