

William M. Bragg, 43rd Virginia Cavalry

William M. “Billy” Bragg was born about 1839 in Warrenton Virginia, the son of Charles Bragg and Mary A. Pasope. Charles Bragg was a carriage maker and mayor of Warrenton in 1860. Billy and his father both signed the ordinance of session in April 1861.ⁱ

William M. Bragg and younger brother, Charles Pasope Bragg, enlisted for one year in the Confederate Army on April 22, 1861 at Warrenton by Captain John Q. Marr. The two brothers were mustered into Company K, 17th Virginia Infantry Regiment at Dumfries, Virginia on April 27, 1861. This was Captain Benjamin H. Shackelford’s company known as the “Warrenton Riflemen.” William M. Bragg was enlisted as an ensign while Charles enlisted as a private.ⁱⁱ

On a muster roll for Company K for the period July to August, 1861, William M. Bragg is shown as “absent on sick leave since June 8, 1861.” He is shown as a private on this roll. He appears again as on “sick leave” on a September to October, 1861 muster roll. He was given a “Certificate of Disability for Discharge” on November 8, 1861 at Centerville by Surgeon T. W. Sears. Sears stated his condition as: “chronic bronchitis with strong disposition to tuberculosis disease of the lungs, and declare my belief that the interest of the service requires his discharge.” The discharge also stated that Bragg had been unfit for duty for the previous five months; that he was 23 years of age, 5’ – 11 ½” tall, with a dark complexion and black hair. His occupation was identified as “coach trimmer.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Billy Bragg sufficiently recovered from the above noted disabilities to be married in the spring of 1862. He married Roberta S. Deshields on March 12, 1862 in Warrenton. She was the daughter of James Deshields, a hotel keeper in Warrenton.^{iv}

William M. Bragg joined Mosby’s fledgling ranger organization some time in the late spring of 1863 and formally enlisted in company A on June 10, 1863 at Rector’s Crossroads. He was enlisted by John S. Mosby for a period of “three years or the war.” He was transferred to company B on October 1, 1863 and promoted to 5th sergeant of that new company. Bragg appeared as present on company B muster roll dated January 22, 1864.^v

Billy Bragg’s brother, Charles, joined the 43rd Cavalry some time during the winter of 1863-4. Both brothers were captured April 23, 1864 in Warrenton.^{vi} In a letter from Warrenton resident, Susan Emeline Jeffords Caldwell, to her husband, Lycurgus Washington Caldwell, dated April 25, 1864, she noted in part:

“The yankees made a raid in town on Friday last and captured William Bragg – he is one of Mosby’s men – He had just come in to see his wife and they were about to start out for the country when the cry was the yankees are coming he then jumped on his brother’s horse hoping to escape, but his horse was rather too fat to run fast and poor fellow he was caught – now to lie in prison for time indefinite, -----“^{vii}

William M. Bragg was sent to the Provost Marshal in Alexandria being received there on April 24, 1864. He identified himself as a quartermaster sergeant. He was forwarded to Old Capitol Prison on April 27, 1864. For some unknown reason, younger brother Charles Bragg was not received by the Provost Marshall until April 29, 1864 and forwarded to Old Capitol Prison on April 30th. The two Bragg brothers and 36 other rangers, being held at Old Capitol Prison, were transferred to Fort Delaware Prison, in the Delaware River, on June 15, 1864.^{viii}

The Bragg brothers received three packages while at Fort Delaware, presumably from their family in Warrenton, between June 1864 and February 1865. Packages were delivered to Charles P. Bragg on July 10 and November 8, 1864. Records show one package delivered to William M. Bragg on December 24, 1864.^{ix} About three months later, March 26 or 27, 1865, William M. Bragg died at Fort Delaware prison. Cause of death was listed as “acute diarrhea.” He was buried in the prison cemetery at Finn’s Point, New Jersey which is now a national cemetery.^x

Charles P. Bragg survived his stay at Fort Delaware Prison along with the other 36 rangers sent there on June 15, 1864. He was released on June 19, 1865 after taking the Oath of Allegiance. He lived out his life in Warrenton, Virginia.^{xi}

Let us never forget the sacrifice of William M. Bragg.
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ⁱ National Archives, Washington D.C., Record Group 29, Records of the Bureau of Census, 1860 Federal Census, Fauquier County, VA., Series M653, Roll 1344, page 179; Record Group 365, Treasury Dept. Collection of Confederate Records, Entry 271, Voting Lists for the Ordinance of Secession, pages 184-5; Chappellear, Nancy and Gott, John K., Compilers. *Early Fauquier County, Virginia Marriage Bonds 1759-1854*. Washington D.C., 1965, page 14.

ⁱⁱ National Archives, Record Group 109, War Dept. Collection of Confederate Records. Compiled Military Service Records for soldiers serving in the 17th Virginia Infantry Regiment, Microfilm Series M324, Roll 563, record #151-2.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, record #152.

^{iv} Buck, Dee Ann. Compiler. "Marriages Fauquier County, Virginia 1854-1880." Fairfax, VA: D. A. Buck, 1996, page 19.

^v National Archives, Record Group 109, Compiled Military Service Records for soldiers serving in the 43rd Battalion, Virginia Partisan Rangers, Microfilm Series M324, Roll 209, Record #156.

^{vi} Ibid, Records #155-6.

^{vii} Welton, J. Michael. Editor. "My Heart is So Rebellious – The Caldwell Letters, 1861 – 1865." Warrenton, Va.: The Fauquier Democrat, 1991, page 221.

^{viii} National Archives, Record Group 109, Compiled Military Service Records for soldiers serving in the 43rd Battalion, Virginia Partisan Rangers, Microfilm Series M324, Roll 209, Record #155-6.

^{ix} National Archives, Record Group 109, Selected Records of the War Department Relating to Confederate Prisoners of War, 1861-1865, Microfilm Series 598, Ft. Delaware, Delaware, Military Prison, Register of Articles and Currency Received for and Delivered to Prisoners, May 1864 – February, 1865, Roll 52, pages 78, 92, 134.

^x National Archives, Compiled Military Service Records for soldiers serving in the 43rd Battalion, Virginia Partisan Rangers, Record #156.

^{xi} Ibid, Record #155.