

James Wesley Keith, Jr., 43rd Virginia Cavalry

James Wesley Keith Sr. and wife Carrie Ann Keith offered four sons to the Confederate cause. Sons George M. Keith and Nathaniel Chapman Keith enlisted in Company D, 20th Battalion, Virginia Heavy Artillery. Sons Jerome Keith and James Wesley Keith, Jr. joined the 43rd Virginia Cavalry sometime in the later part of 1864.¹

On October 9, 1864, James Keith joined with several of Mosby's men in the capture of a detachment of 17 men from the Second Ohio Cavalry in Ashby's Gap in the Blue Ridge Mountains located at the corner of Loudoun, Fauquier and Clarke Counties, Virginia.²

On March 21, 1865, Keith joined with Captain Alfred Glascock and 128 rangers south of Hamilton, a small Quaker village located a couple of miles east of Purcellville on the Leesburg-Snickers Gap Turnpike in Loudoun County, Virginia. The rangers charged a detachment of the Twelfth Pennsylvania Cavalry under command of Colonel Marcus A. Reno on the Lincoln to Hamilton road just south of the latter place. The Rangers pursued the Union cavalry north towards Hamilton until they ran into a Regiment of the First U.S. Veteran Infantry positioned just south of the little village.³ Ranger John H. Alexander wrote in his post-war book: "They pursued the flying foe back beyond the first body of works, until they saw the long blue line of infantry rise up from behind the hedge fence that skirted one of the village lots. As the volley rang out, our boys swayed off into the woods by the roadside, but left Keith lying dead in the road from a mini ball which had entered his eye."⁴ Ranger J. Marshall Crawford stated in his post-war book: "Among our boys, James Keith and Binford were killed at the head of the column, ----"⁵

James Wesley Keith, Jr. was born about 1845 in Amherst County, Virginia.⁶ After his death near Hamilton, Virginia, his remains were returned to his home where he was buried at Springhill Cemetery, Lynchburg, Virginia.

Let us never forget the sacrifice of James Wesley Keith, Jr.

© Hugh Keen, December 2004

¹ National Archives, Washington, D.C., 1860 Federal Census, Amherst County, Virginia, Series M653, Roll 1332, page 275; Hewett, Janet B., Ed. "The Roster of Confederate Soldiers 1861-1865," Vol. IX. Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Co., 1996, pp. 81-2; National Archives, Washington D.C., Compiled Military Service Records for soldiers serving in the 43rd Battalion, Virginia Partisan Rangers, Microfilm #324, Roll #208, record #780.

² Williamson, James J. "Mosby's Rangers." 2nd ed., New York, N.Y.: Sturgis & Welton Company, 1909, page 255.

³ Keen, Hugh C. and Mewborn, Horace, "43rd Battalion Virginia Cavalry Mosby's Command." Lynchburg, VA: H. E. Howard, Inc., 1993, pages 252-3.

⁴ Alexander, John H. "Mosby's Men." New York, N.Y.: The Neale Publishing Company, 1907, page 160.

⁵ Crawford, J. Marshall. "Mosby and His Men: A Record of the Adventures of that Renowned Partisan Ranger, John S. Mosby, Colonel C.S.A." New York, N.Y.: G. W. Carleton & Co., Publishers, 1867, page 348.

⁶ National Archives, 1840 Federal Census, Amherst County, Virginia, Series T5, Roll 177, page 218; 1860 Federal Census, Amherst County, Virginia, Series M653, Roll 1332, page 275.