

A Special Chunk of Meat Preserved for 160 Years

On the morning of May 3, 1864, Private Rufus Clay "R. C." Woodlief of Bobbitt, North Carolina was serving in the Confederate Army, Company K, of the 44th Regiment. The 44th was formed in March 1862 at Camp Mangum near Raleigh. The men there mustered had enlisted in companies recruited in their own separate counties (nine in all), but as the War dragged on and after many battles, some companies combined because so many men were killed or wounded. Initially nine companies composed the 44th Regiment and were gathered from a large central section of the state. Company K, also known as "The Franklin Guides to Freedom" came from Franklin County and the men's desire was to protect the homes and hearths of neighbors, friends and loved ones from what they viewed as an aggressive and overbearing hand of Federalism. On that morning in May 1864, after Rufus Woodlief drew his daily ration of meat he sent it home to his mother in North Carolina by way of a brother. Two days later he would find himself fighting along the Plank Road in a dismal, bloody contest history has labeled "The Battle of the Wilderness." Rufus would survive the battle and the War, returning to North Carolina to live until 1925. According to the August 8, 1886 issue of the Franklinton Weekly newspaper (Franklin County, NC), the Confederate meat ration he sent home to his mother was the only piece of its kind known to exist at that time. This may still be the case in 2023.

How the Daily Ration Ended up in Highland County

Darlene Hill of Valley Center (at Mill Gap in Highland County) is a first great granddaughter of Rufus Clay "R. C." Woodlief. When she was a young girl in the 1950s, she and her mother, Daisy Christine Woodlief Outten, were given the relic when they were visiting family in the Kittrell-Bobbitt area of Vance County, North Carolina. The meat as seen now, sealed in its original jar, was kept in an old country store in Bobbitt where Christine was raised, and was then owned by Christine's two aunts, Clara and Addie. When Christine died in 1990, Darlene brought the relic to Valley Center and stored it in a cabinet where it remained for 33 years. It is presently on loan to the Highland County Historical Society and is being displayed in the museum at McDowell, Virginia. When looking at the meat, which is barely the size of a piece of fudge, it makes one appreciate the depravation men of the South endured near the end of the tragic War Between

the States. Many of them returned to their homes threadbare, shoeless and starving.

An Interesting Side Note

Rufus Clay Woodlief was the fifth great grandson of Captain John Woodlief (then spelled Woodliffe), who was the English sea captain who sailed the good ship Margaret out of Bristol, England in 1619 to help establish Berkeley Hundred along the James River in present day Charles City County, Virginia. Berkeley Hundred comprised about eight thousand acres on the north bank of the river, and was the site of the earliest documented Thanksgiving celebration when the settlers first landed. Two years later the Pilgrims would celebrate their first Thanksgiving at Plymouth.

