



Figure 1.
Captain Milton
Hall Harmon



Figure 2. Map of Montgomery County, Virginia, c. 1860, showing the Harman farm along Crab Creek and transected by the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad. It lists the farm as Mrs. Harman's, so the survey must have been done after John's death in 1860. An 1864 map drawn by Confederate States Engineer Gilmer is also useful. (Map from the Library of Congress.)

The Forgotten Fencible

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Editor's Note: All the records and the headstone spell Milton Harmon's name with an "o," but all other family members spelled their last name with an "a." In this article, the names are spelled as they are historically documented.

Behind a row of round hay bales and entangled beneath honeysuckle and fox grapevines, a forgotten soldier lies. Few people even know that a graveyard is located on the bluff above Crab Creek near Christiansburg, Virginia. Fewer still know of this brave soldier who, along with members of his family, claims that spot of land for eternity.

The resting soldier is Captain Milton Hall Harmon of Company G of the 4th Virginia Infantry.¹ The men of that group called themselves the "Montgomery Fencibles"; history, however, remembers them as members of the "Stonewall Brigade."² Whatever the moniker, Harmon died in service to his state (Figure 1).

Milton Hall Harmon was born on November 11, 1838, the eldest son of Catherine Hall Harman and John Harman. Strong, proud, and blessed with rugged good looks, young Milton grew up on a prosperous farm located along Crab Creek to the west of the hamlet of Christiansburg, watching the area around Christiansburg grow as well. The newly laid Virginia and Tennessee railroad tracks transected the Harman farm.³ Milton along with his brothers — William, David, Hannibal, Zachary, and Lycurgus — spent many hours watching the railroad's progress (Figure 2).

The Harman family was economically comfortable on their 927-acre farm. That farm had been part of an original land grant given to James Patton in 1753 by King George II of Great Britain. It was purchased in 1775 by Joseph Cofer, who left it to his daughter Catherine and her husband,

Henry Harman.⁴ The land then passed to their sons, one of whom was John.⁵ The 1860 Census lists John Harman's real estate value as \$20,000 and his personal property at \$5,425.⁶ The Harmans used four slaves on the farm in 1850 and 10 slaves in 1860.⁷ An 1860 inventory of John Harman's estate listed the slaves as Malinda and two unnamed children; Milly and two unnamed children; and individuals named George, Sam, James, and Gad.⁸ The latter slave was noted as "unsound."⁹ There was also one white female on the farm named Naomi King.¹⁰ Milton's four sisters — Caroline, Catherine, Rebecca, and Elizabeth — helped fill the house.¹¹

In 1860, after the death of the patriarch, John, Catherine assumed the role of family leader. By that year, Milton was active in his local volunteer militia. He had joined the 5th regiment of cavalry of the 26th brigade of the Virginia militia at the age of 15 and was commissioned a first lieutenant¹² (Figure 3). His command was busy training new recruits, which gave him the opportunity to sharpen his leadership skills. A younger brother, David Hubert, was away at school, and Catherine worried constantly about David's character and companions.¹³ The remaining brothers — Hannibal, William, Zachary, and Lycurgus — stayed at home to help keep the farm running.

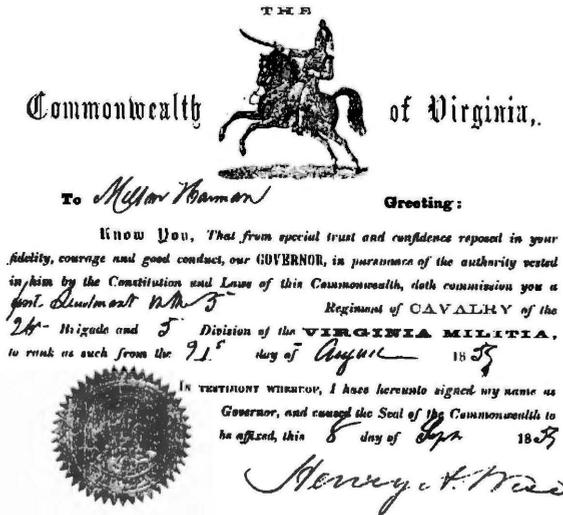


Figure 3. Milton Hall Harman's Virginia Militia commission.

Milton's volunteer company was sent to watch the execution of two of John Brown's conspirators in the 1859 Harper's Ferry raid.¹⁴ That first witness of death and the reality of political turmoil probably had a profound impact on the young militiaman and may have helped prepare him for the hostilities brewing on the horizon.

After the fall of Fort Sumter, President Lincoln issued a call for 7,500 volunteers. This call to arms was viewed in the South as aggression, and southerners responded by forming units to defend against an impending invasion. Young Milton Harmon, like many of his neighbors, rode into Christiansburg and enlisted on April 17, 1861, under Captain Robert Trigg. He was welcomed to the unit as a second sergeant.¹⁵ The men of the newly formed Company G entrained on April 22, 1861, and joined others from Montgomery and Rockbridge counties to officially form the 4th Virginia Infantry.¹⁶ Virginia quickly recruited an army, and by July that army, which included Milton, stood on the defensive side of a town called Manassas. The 4th Virginia was with the reserve units assigned to artillery at that first Battle of Manassas. Milton witnessed the baptism by fire with the same confidence displayed by the entire brigade, which was henceforth tagged with the name "Stonewall."¹⁷

The first southern victory was a complete rout of the federal troops at Manassas, but the battle awakened Southerners to realize that the war would not end in 90 days as first predicted. The army went through a period of adjustment, and camp routine took hold in the youthful souls of the first volunteers. As part of the transition, field elections were held in each company. In the spring of 1862, Milton wrote his hometown friend, Captain John Crow Wade, about the recent activities of the 4th Virginia. He announced the election results and told of the horrible weather the men had been exposed to on a recent movement.¹⁸ He wrote that his unit had been marching for the past week and that the regiment was now stationed eighteen miles from Harrisonburg.¹⁹ He stated that he had been in the "rain for the last five days and at this time it is snowing like five hundred. We are without tents, we are certainly seeing a hard time."²⁰ Milton showed his concern for his company, placing a request for 75 ready-made gray uniforms, as voted on by his men.²¹ He ended the letter, "all the boys send their best to you. It is snowing so fast and I am so cold I can not write any more now — write soon."²²

During the next field election, Milton Harmon was elected to a higher rank. On September 12, he accepted promotion to 2nd lieutenant.²³ The combination of prior experience, recent good conduct, general likability, and leadership potential made Milton a likely choice for an officer.

The men of Company G called themselves the Montgomery Fencibles, General Robert E. Lee called the regiment the "Harmless Fourth," and everyone else referred to the brigade as "Jackson's Foot Cavalry."²⁴ The men of Stonewall's brigade received much praise as they fought through many engagements, including the battles of the 1862 Valley Campaign, 2nd Manassas, and the Sharpsburg invasion. Milton was promoted to captain on April 22, 1863. As captain he handled such day-to-day responsibilities as paymaster collection and distribution, recruitment, quartermaster requests, and management of his men.²⁶ He was compensated for this service with a monthly salary of \$130.²⁷ Due in part to his responsible nature and commitment to duty, Milton was also assigned as sentinel of the day on at least two occasions. The countersign word and orders for each day, sewn inside his uniform by his own hand, survived the war²⁸ (Figure 4).

By May 1863, the Stonewall Brigade had already etched itself onto the annals of history. However, its most spectacular and devastating battle was yet to come. At the crossroad of Chancellorsville, Generals Robert E.

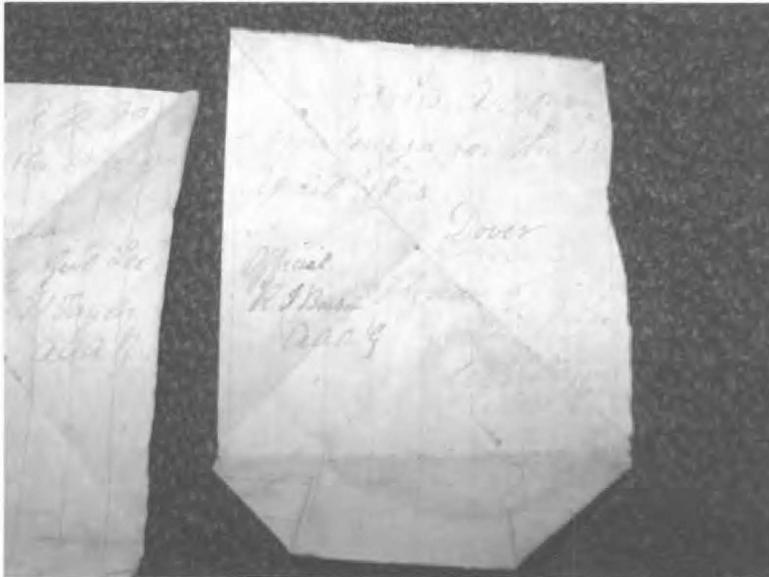


Figure 4. Official orders found sewn in Captain Harmon's uniform.

Lee and Thomas J. Jackson did the unexpected and split their forces in the face of a greater foe. This daring and brilliant maneuver won the Army of Northern Virginia its greatest victory. It came, however, at a very high price. Not only did the South lose Jackson, but the town of Christiansburg lost an unusually large number of men, one of whom was Catherine Harman's first-born son.²⁹

On May 3, the flank movement devised by Jackson ended with a surprise attack on exposed Federals. By nightfall, the attack had subsided to sporadic firing outbreaks. But at dawn, the Stonewall brigade, then under the temporary command of General J.E.B. Stuart, was thrust back into battle.³⁰ Their objective was to take the defenses atop Fairview Ridge.³¹ But first the battle-worn men had to wrestle their way through a swamp, ensnared in thick underbrush and past other troops who refused to advance.³² The 4th Virginia then made an inspired charge up Fairview Ridge toward the Federal artillery.³³ Captain Milton Harmon was killed as the final charge began.³⁴ The actions that led to his death were recorded by Major William Terry in his official battle report.³⁵ The gallantry Terry witnessed and recorded earned Captain Harmon a posthumous award for bravery, and his name appears on the Southern Roll of Honor for the Battle of Chancellorsville.³⁶

Fellow soldier Joseph McMurrin wrote from the front lines on May 4, detailing the bravery of Milton Harmon and other men from Christiansburg. The letter describes the charge up Fairview Ridge:

After 1½ hours graping our position was changed to the right of the enemy's second line of defense, from which they had been driven by some of our troops. A South Carolina brigade occupied the works, and our brigade charged over their heads, they crying don't hurt us — and advanced some distance into open woods and received and returned the fire of the Army massed behind their 3rd line of defense, but being exposed to a raking fire and being necessitated, we retired behind the works again, the South Carolina brigade refusing to advance stating that they were put there to hold the works. Our loss here was very heavy. Here it was Captain Harmon fell, and also Gen. Paxton. Another brigade coming up we made another advance led on by Gen. Jeb Stuart, who called loudly for our brigade and away we went to storm the 3rd and last line of defense — we drove the Yankees helter-skelter and then charged their batteries.³⁷

McMurrin notes in his letter that he buried the bodies of Captain Harmon and others from Christiansburg on the battlefield and marked the graves to enable their families to find them.³⁸

According to family lore, the body of Captain Harmon was retrieved within weeks of his death, returned to the family farm, and buried near his father. A white marble headstone decorated with a peaceful weeping willow marks his final resting spot³⁹ (Figure 5). Catherine and her family mourned their loss and longed to have Milton under their roof, but they were forced to settle for the boards that bore his body home. The boards remained under the porch of the family home for years.

Six months after Milton's death, his younger brother Hannibal enlisted in Milton's company, carrying the name of Harman through the remaining struggle. The 4th Virginia Infantry was a skeleton crew when it officially surrendered. Nonetheless, Hannibal survived the war, ending his days as a soldier at Appomattox Court House.⁴⁰



Figure 5. Captain Harmon's headstone, in the cemetery off Crab Creek Road, Christiansburg, Virginia. It reads: "Captain Milton Harmon / Born / November 13, 1838 / And killed May 3rd 1863 / In battle of Chancellorsville, Va. / His trust was in God"

Milton's brother David enlisted with the 11th Virginia Infantry in 1861, but was forced to resign a year later due to a vision problem recorded as "ophthalima and distention of one eye."⁴¹ David's disability certificate included a physical description of the young Harman brother. He was five feet six inches tall, fair complexion, gray eyes, and light hair.⁴² David, nonetheless, reenlisted in 1864 with the Home Guard commanded by Colonel James Wade.⁴³ William, though listed as crippled, also served in Wade's brigade.⁴⁴

The war ended sadly for the South, and the Harmans. After the war, the family's road to survival was filled with both hardship and happiness. Zachery Taylor Harman was accidentally killed in the nearby rail yard in 1885.⁴⁵ William suffered financial ruin and went bankrupt.⁴⁶ Hannibal continued his commitment to his community and was elected Sheriff of Vicker's Switch. He also ran a successful hotel and was a community leader.⁴⁷ Lycurgus continued the family tradition of farming and raised a large family along Crab Creek (Figure 6). Milton's sisters adjusted well in the post-war years; one married into the Chrisman family, another into the



Figure 6. Harman homestead along Crab Creek. The picture shows Milton's younger brother Lycurgus' family circa 1890.

Christian family.⁴⁸ The youngest sister, Rebecca, married twice, the second time to Doctor Lusbaugh, who practiced medicine in the Vicker's Switch community.⁴⁹

Through it all, the Harman family remained strong and proud. And although the life of Captain Milton Hall Harmon faded from memory, his bravery and his dedication to his native Virginia was typical of many young men of his era and should not be forgotten.

Endnotes

1. Harman family cemetery, Crab Creek Road, Christiansburg, Virginia. Note that all records and his headstone spell Milton Harmon with an "o"; all other family members spell the name with an "a." I spell the names as they are historically documented. Descendants, however, use "Harman."
2. James I. Robertson, Jr., *The 4th Virginia Infantry, Regimental Series* (Lynchburg, Virginia, 1982), 4. Hereafter listed as Robertson, *Fourth Virginia*.
3. Clovis E. Linkous, *The Twelve Stones of Belmont* (Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1976), 30. See also map, p. 14.
4. Linkous, *Twelve Stones*, 1, 3, 50.
5. Linkous, *Twelve Stones*, 50.
6. United States Free Population Census, Montgomery County, Virginia, 1860.
7. United States Slave Population Census, Montgomery County, Virginia, 1850, 1860.
8. Personal property inventory, John Harman, 1860.
9. John Harman inventory.
10. United States Free Population Census, Montgomery County, Virginia, 1860.
11. United States Free Population Census, Montgomery County, Virginia, 1860.
12. Certificate of Commission in the Virginia Militia for Milton Harman, 21 August 1853.
13. Catherine Harman, letter to David H. Harman, 30 January 1860.
14. Catherine Harman.
15. *Compiled Service Record of Soldiers Who Served from the State of Virginia*, Milton H. Harmon, 4th Virginia Infantry.
16. Robertson, *Fourth Virginia*, 5.
17. Robertson, *Fourth Virginia*.
18. Milton Harmon letter to Captain John C. Wade, 24 April 1862.
19. Milton Harmon to Captain John C. Wade.
20. Milton Harmon to Captain John C. Wade.
21. Milton Harmon to Captain John C. Wade.
22. Milton Harmon to Captain John C. Wade.
23. Milton H. Harmon's service record.
24. James I. Robertson, Jr., *The Stonewall Brigade* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1963), vii, 11.
25. Milton H. Harmon's service record.

26. Milton H. Harmon's service record.
27. Milton H. Harmon's service record.
28. Official orders, Army of Northern Virginia to Captain Harmon from Army Assistant Adjunct General Walter Taylor, 6 April 1863, and 13 April 1863 (private family collection, Blacksburg, Virginia).
29. Milton H. Harmon's service record.
30. United States War Department, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, 1880–1901), series I, vol. 25, 1019. Henceforth listed as OR.
31. OR., 1018.
32. OR., 1018–9.
33. OR., 1019.
34. OR., 1019.
35. OR., 1018–9.
36. OR., 1055.
37. Joseph McMurrin letter to James Miller, 4 May 1864.
38. McMurrin letter.
39. Captain Milton Hall Harmon tombstone, Harman family cemetery.
40. *Compiled Service Record of Soldiers Who Served from the State of Virginia*, Hannibal Harman, 4th Virginia Infantry.
41. *Compiled Service Record of Soldiers Who Served from the State of Virginia*, David H. Harman, 11th Virginia Infantry.
42. David H. Harman's service record, 11th Virginia Infantry.
43. David H. Harman's service record, Wade's Brigade.
44. United States Southern Claims Commission (Washington, 1888), Claims filed in Montgomery County, Virginia, William H. Harman, p. 31. See also *Compiled Service Record of Soldiers Who Served from the State of Virginia*, William H. Harman, Wade's Brigade.
45. Harman family history (private family collection), Blacksburg, Virginia.
46. United States Southern Claims Commission (Washington, 1888), claims filed from Montgomery County, Virginia, William H. Harman, 31.
47. United States Census Population, Montgomery County, Virginia, 1870.
48. Linkous, *Twelve Stones*, 50.
49. Linkous, *Twelve Stones*, 51.

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