

POW Cover – Mosby’s Partisan Rangers

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Guerrillas, bushwackers, and roving thieves were how the Union viewed Mosby’s Partisan Rangers. To the people of Virginia, they were heroes and patriots. The soldiers of the unit referred to themselves simply as “Mosby’s Men.”

The 43rd Virginia Cavalry Battalion Partisan Rangers was formed in the spring of 1863 and continued to add companies into 1864 with Major John S. Mosby (later promoted Lieutenant Colonel in January 1864) in command. The unit was given regimental designation as Mosby’s Regiment of Partisan Rangers in December 1864. This was an unattached independent command organized under the Partisan Ranger Act passed by the Confederate Congress in 1862. The unit was organized with the permission of General Robert E. Lee and reported directly to General Lee. The Partisan Rangers operated behind Union lines in Virginia mainly in Fauquier and Loudoun Counties with activities centered in the area of Warrenton which is Major Mosby’s home town. This area of Northern Virginia between the Rappahannock and Potomac Rivers and east of the Shenandoah Valley is still known today as “Mosby’s Confederacy.” The unit was directed to disrupt Union communications and to interfere as much as possible with Union supplies. The partisan rangers were very successful in that regard conducting numerous small raids and engaged in still more numerous skirmishes with Union troops developing into the “stuff of legend.” Mosby’s Partisan Rangers never formally surrendered. After the surrender at Appomattox, the unit simply disbanded in late April 1865.



John Singleton Mosby (1833-1916) (public domain photo at left in uniform as a Major 1863-1864) first entered service as a private in Company D 1st Virginia Cavalry in 1861. In early 1862, he was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant, promoted 1st Lieutenant and then Captain while serving as a staff officer to General JEB Stuart and General Lee until forming his independent command as a Major in early 1863. During the war, he is said to have been wounded three times and was captured as a POW at Beaver Dam, Virginia in July 1862. He was confined for a short time at Fortress Monroe until exchanged the following month. Colonel Mosby had an active political life after the war practicing law in Warrenton, Virginia and San Francisco, California. He was appointed US Consul in Hong Kong (1878-1885) by President Grant with whom he became good friends. Colonel Mosby is buried in the Warrenton, Virginia cemetery.

With this short capsule background history concerning Mosby’s unit, attention is directed to the fact that any POW philatelic item that can be directly linked to Mosby’s Partisan Rangers is indeed a scarce item. Such a cover would be a prized addition to any CSA military POW related collection. Such covers are very difficult to identify. Very often the proper history and identification of the cover can only be accomplished with an in-depth research into any

information that the cover bears. Such a cover shown below has recently been identified. This is an unassuming POW cover from Camp Chase, Ohio (Columbus) to Alexandria, Virginia showing strictly Union postal use. There is no military designation on the cover of any kind, only the Camp Chase examiner's handstamp showing that the cover originated from the prison. The postmark is Columbus, Ohio dated 28 OCT. The addressee is Mrs. Catherine Hooper, Alexandria, Virginia. On the face of the cover written in very light pencil is a name, "R. L. Spindle." The same name in pencil is also written on the reverse perhaps written there by the addressee. A fair assumption is that the cover is most likely from a Confederate POW at Camp Chase to a friend or relative. The truth is just a little bit different.



USA 3c Rose Columbus, Ohio 28 OCT (1864) to Mrs. Catherine Hooper in Alexandria, Virginia (Union occupied). The Camp Chase, Ohio examiner's handstamp is the subtype used from August 1864 to the end of the war and indicates that the cover originated at the prison and was most likely sent by a Confederate POW.

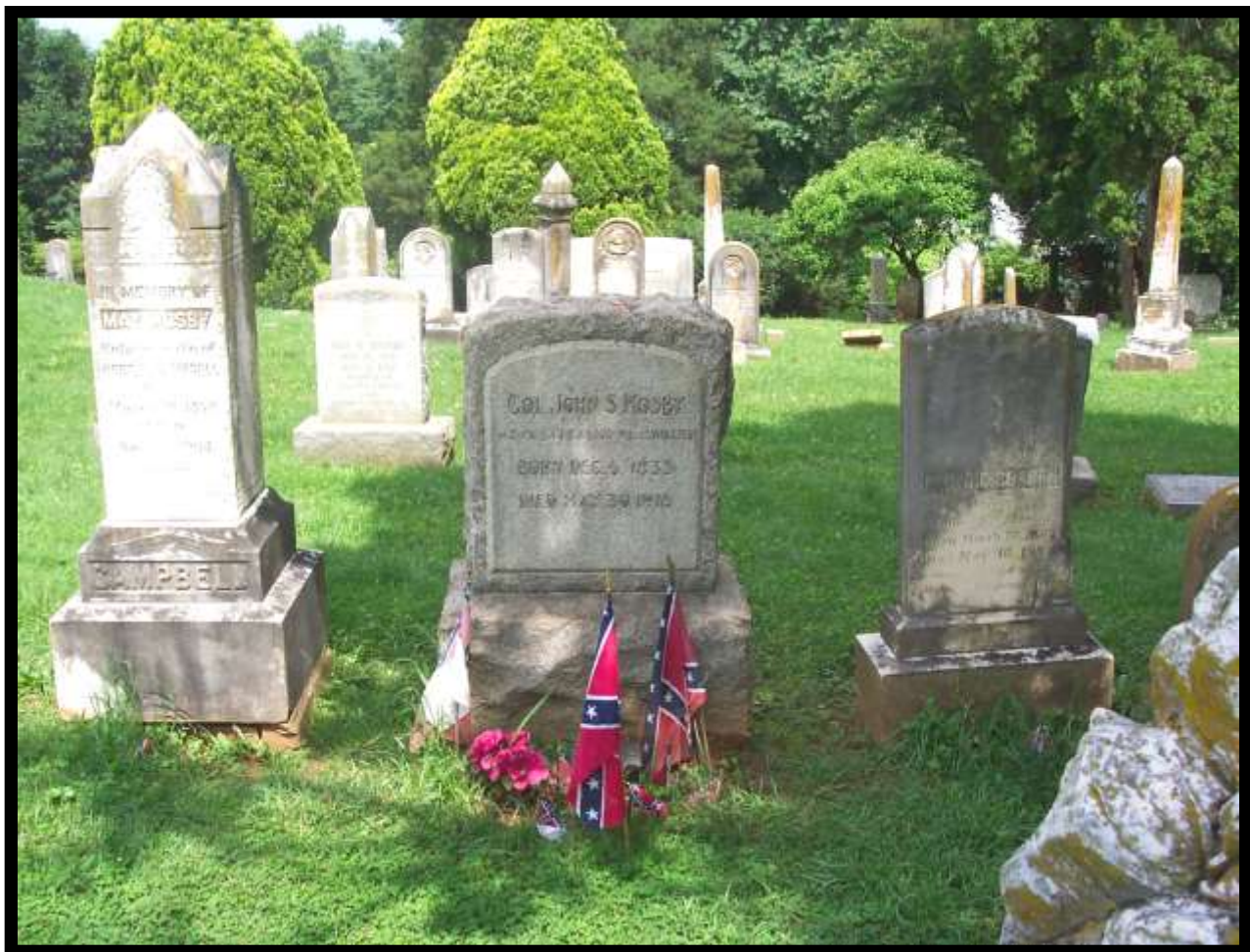
Catherine Hooper resided in Union occupied Alexandria, Virginia during the war years and corresponded with a number of different Confederate POW's in various Union prisons in order to give them aid and comfort whenever possible. She would write to the prisoners' families and would often send money and supplies to them. She became known throughout the South as Alexandria's "Angel of Mercy" for the undying assistance she rendered to the Confederate POW's in Union prisons. In 1866, Mrs. Hooper relocated to Bates, Arkansas. Her Civil War letters donated by the family are archived in Little Rock at the Arkansas History Commission. Among the archived letters are three letters from Robert L. Spindle who was confined at Camp Chase. These three letters date between October and December 1864. The cover in Figure 1 housed one of the letters in that correspondence.

Robert L. Spindle (1840-1924) enlisted as a private in Company B of Mosby's 43rd Virginia Cavalry Battalion in April 1863. He is listed as captured as a POW by Union forces in Loudoun County, Virginia on June 10, 1864 and sent as a POW to Camp Chase arriving a week later.

Information later shared by his family states that he arrived at the prison with a note stating that he was a guerrilla bushwacker and a horse thief. As a member of Mosby's command with that designation, he most likely did not have an easy time as a POW. He was officially paroled and exchanged in March 1865 but was not released until after the war was over in June 1865. After the war, he resided in Centreville, Virginia and later served as a Fairfax County commissioner. To this day there is a street named for him in Centreville.

Robert L. Spindle had a brother, Benjamin T. Spindle, who served in the same unit and was also captured as a POW serving time in both the Old Capitol Prison in Washington DC and Fort Warren in Boston Harbor. The Spindle brothers both corresponded with Mrs. Hooper while they were prisoners. A third brother, Spottsylvania C. Spindle, served in Company D 17th Virginia Infantry. Although wounded at Seven Pines, Virginia May 31, 1862 and later losing a leg at Drewry's Bluff, Virginia May 16, 1864, Spottsylvania Spindle was never a POW.

The exploits of the "Grey Ghost" of the Confederacy are legendary and have been chronicled in many books and often embellished in movies and television. Covers from this unit do exist. However, these covers are often hidden and require some diligence to identify.



Colonel Mosby's gravesite in Warrenton, Virginia (JLK photograph June 2003).