

Figure 1: The author's Confederate cover has a family connection.

Texas Frontier Mail

By Roy O. Reynolds

I am a collector of Confederate and Civil War era covers and philatelic items. Recently, I purchased a Confederate Texas cover that was unique and Confederate, but not Confederate.

It reminded me of my great-great-great-grandfather and his service in Confederate military forces in Texas and inspired this article.

My lineage, on my mother's side, goes back to Lavaca/San Antonio, Texas, and these ancestors were first hand witnesses of the U.S. Civil War and the tumultuous events of the war and frontier Indian raids during those bloody times. This cover inspired me to tell its story.

The cover is pristine with a Trish Kaufmann pedigree and is manuscript cancelled and addressed Official Business to, "Colonel J Schmitz, cmdg. 1st Regt. 31st Brigade Texas State Troops."

This was a key unit in the Frontier Organization. The command, a Texas state militia force designed to battle marauding Indians on the frontier, was created December 15, 1863, when Confederate Texas Governor Pendleton Murrah and the Texas Legislature created the Frontier Organization, pending the transfer of the Texas state Frontier Regiment to Confederate service.

The Frontier Regiment operated out of a string of abandoned Federal forts along the frontier.

The law created a militia of Texas residents from Texas frontier counties to defend their state in companies of 25 to 65 men in a defined frontier defense line.

All frontier counties were divided into three districts and 59 frontier counties were commanded by a major or higher rank. These were not Confederate soldiers, but clerks, town folks, bankers, blacksmiths and a myriad of others. Roving patrols were in the field on a rotation basis all the time.

The cover is addressed to Col. J. Schmitz. Col. Schmitz's 1st Regiment, 31st Brigade. Texas State Troops, was stationed in Comal County with its headquarters at New Braunfels, Texas.

Comal County was a hub of activity and a key Confederate manufacturing center of paper, gun powder, flour, and the like.

Many goods from Mexico also passed through there. Cattle for the armies further east also were located at New Braunfels. It is also very likely that a Confederate Post Office was located in New Braunfels and it was here that Col. Schmitz's letter was likely processed.

Fifty man companies was the average and fifteen man squads the norm. Patrols arrived and departed here regularly fighting Indians, deserters, bandits, and Mexican guerillas who raided across the border. They saved the settlers,

often women whose husbands were off at war.

My g-g-g-grandmother Charity C. Presnell was one of these settlers. She had several small children to raise while her husband was off serving in the war in Texas, Louisiana, and elsewhere. He was part of Capt. Daly's Texas Mounted Rifles Company, Maj. Ragsdale's Arizona Texas Cavalry Battalion, and Col. S.M. Baird's 4th Texas Cavalry Regiment, Arizona Brigade (CS Army).

To survive the hard times she received aid in foodstuffs to feed her family from the Confederate Texas government.

Col. Schmitz commanded this militia force in 1862 out of Comal County. The Frontier Organization had 4,000 men under muster by March 1, 1864, when it assumed control of frontier defense. The leadership changed several times during the war with Col. J. Schmitz in 1862, Col. G. Lohmitz in 1863, and other commanders later in the war.

The frontier stretched from the northern Texas area to the Rio Grande River in the the south, a lot of ground to protect.

Sharp fights at Dove Creek and Ellison Springs were among the battles that Frontier Organization roving patrols fought with Indians during the war. Many more were not recorded. Comanches, Apaches, Kickapoos, Kiowas, Potawatomies, and others all battled Frontier Organization militia during the war, killing many settlers.

While not a pro-slavery county, Comal County was pro-Confederate (the destination of the Col. Schmitz cover), with New Braunfels as its largest town. A Confederate Post Office was located there. It was defense district headquarters for 21 frontier counties for the Frontier Organization, plus a major Confederate supply center and center for cattle herding that went east to the Mississippi River. Gen. Robert Bechem, Texas State Troops, commanded from there.

The Arizona Brigade operated on the Texas frontier and patrolled in northern Texas and on the western frontier. On May 30, 1863, Maj. Ragsdale's Arizona Brigade, Texas Cavalry Battalion (Maj. Samuel G. Ragsdale and his battalion—my g-g-g-grandfather in Company D) was transferred to the northern subdistrict of Texas in Bonham, (Fannin County) Texas.

After the disastrous 1862 Confederate New Mexico campaign, it shared with the Frontier Organization the Indian raids, Federal Army

skirmishes, and battles in Texas and southern Indian Territory.

The Schmitz cover would have undertaken an arduous journey to reach the colonel's hands from wherever it originated (not on cover), but is a fine example of philatelic enterprise.

A simple (X) manuscript cancel adorns the stamp on the cover in the

upper left corner. The cover is in excellent condition and quite pleasing to the eye. It is an orange-tan color and probably delivered by horse messenger, since no steamboat cancel is on the cover and there were yet no railroads in Texas. Indians, robbers, and Mexican bandits all infested the area of the frontier. The French of Napoleon III and Maximilian's Mexican armies were battling the Juarista's in Chihuahua at the time. Weather, and plain bad luck could all impact Texas postal operations during the war years. The stamp is a light blue Scott CSA 11 with all four margins and a nice color to it.

My g-g-g-grandfather, Pvt. Luke Presnell II, and his wife and family survived the war and went on to have my g-g-grandmother Emily Presnell, who gave birth to my grandmother (Dorothy) Lillian Presnell on July 3, 1907.

Pvt. Luke Presnell II and his unit surrendered to federal authorities in mid-April 1865 at Columbus, Texas. He was paroled and returned home to Lavaca/San Antonio. Thus ends this tale of the journey of one Texas cover.

The Civil War has been over for 150 years, but it has left an indelible mark on our American society. Men of white, black, Indian, and hispanic cultures participated in the war and their ancestor's service, for whichever side, is a badge of honor for their descendants. Luke Presnell II was such a man to me. This Col. J. Schmitz cover reminds me of him and the many who served and died for what they believed in.

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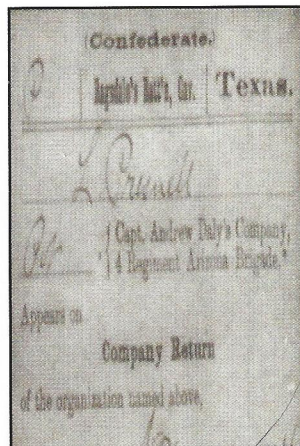


Figure 2: Pvt. Luke Presnell, Arizona Brigade CSA document file.