

Story of General Felix K. Zollicoffer
Putnam County Herald Newspaper

Saturday, October 7, 1933, is the date set for dedicating Zollicoffer Park, commemorating the death of Gen. Felix K. Zollicoffer in the battle of Fishing Creek, Kentucky, January 19, 1862.

This should be of some interest to people of Putnam and adjoining countries as the 25th Regiment, C.S.A. organized and commanded by Col. Sidney S. Stanton, was actively engaged in this battle, and was made up of soldiers from this section of the State. The loss of this regiment was not so heavy as some others as Col. Stanton had advantageously placed it along a fence row which happened to be on that section of the battlefield, thus giving it a great deal of protection. Their loss was: 10 killed, 28 wounded and 17 missing.

There were three soldiers from Putnam County that were eye witnesses to the death of General Zollicoffer, they were Riley Anderson, James Evans and P. Jones, the last named was later a Captain in the Federal Army. These three soldiers had taken refuge behind a large chestnut tree when the General came rushing up, mistaking a body of Union soldiers just beyond them as part of his own command and was killed. He fell from his horse at their feet and was supposed to have been killed by Col. Fry of the Union Army, however he had three bullet holes in his breast, and it is probable that several shots were fired at him. Two of his staff were killed with him.

General George Thomas, commanding the Federal Army, had the body of General Zollicoffer sent to Louisville, Kentucky, and embalmed, then shipping it to his family in Nashville. His body lay in state at the State Capitol for two days. He was buried in a fine uniform with his sword laying on top of the casket. In the funeral procession his fine horse was led behind him and his body was laid to rest in the old Nashville Cemetery along with Grundy, Roberson and many other distinguished Tennesseans.

As a result of this battle the Confederate Army lost Kentucky.

Article typed by Mrs. Robert Anderson Shanks for Mrs. Audra Anderson Denny
June 4, 1961

Just where was the battle of Mill Springs?

The battle took place in western Pulaski County, Kentucky, which is located in south-central Kentucky. The battlefield site is located today on Ky. Hwy. 235, just south of the town of Nancy, which is on Ky. Hwy. 80. You can reach Nancy from the Cumberland Parkway (there is a marked exit about four miles west of Nancy), or you can follow Ky. Hwy. 80 about eight miles west from Somerset is the closest city. Somerset is located at the intersection of the Cumberland Parkway/Ky.Hwy.80, and US27.

General Felix K. Zollicoffer

Few aspects of the battle of Mill Springs are as surrounded by controversy as the death of Gen. Felix Kirk Zollicoffer, CSA. Ignoring the embellishments and the whys-and-wherefores, what seems clear is that Zollicoffer mistook Union troops for his. He wished to order them to cease firing on their own men, since he thought they were all Confederates. Whatever the cause, it is evident that Zollicoffer did not recognize the Union officer to whom he spoke as an enemy; neither did this officer recognize Zollicoffer as a Confederate. Or possibly, Zollicoffer did recognize the enemy and realized his mistake, and attempted to bluff his way out. Only as they parted, and one of Zollicoffer's staff rode out of the woods to warn his commander (meanwhile firing at the Federals), did both two parties realize the truth. In the ensuing exchange of fire, Zollicoffer was shot dead from his horse. There the controversy begins ... Who, exactly, killed Zollicoffer? He was one of the first Confederate generals to fall in battle (even today you can read sources that say he was the first, but this is not true), and there was some posturing by several different sources to claim "credit" for his death. It is clear that the Union officer to whom he spoke, Col. Speed S. Fry of the 4th Kentucky Infantry, fired at Zollicoffer after his aide opened fire, but it is also clear that several Union soldiers who were nearby also fired at Zollicoffer and his aide. In their hasty movement to the battle area there had been some mixing of the Federal units, and men from Fry's own 4th Kentucky Infantry, as well as the 1st Kentucky Cavalry and 10th Indiana Infantry were all at the scene. Fry himself made no special claim that his shot killed Zollicoffer, but he was given "credit" by most period accounts. Controversy also surrounds the treatment of Zollicoffer's body after his death. He fell in or near the Mill Springs Road, between the lines (but closer to the Federals). At some point his body was moved out of the road, to the vicinity of an oak tree nearby. After the Confederate retreat the body was recognized by Federal soldiers, and numerous period accounts attest that they immediately took souvenirs from the body: pieces of clothing, buttons, even locks of hair. This treatment was vehemently denied by some Northern newspaper accounts, but there can be no doubt that it happened. However, as soon as Federal officers arrived on the scene, the body was protected, and was later cleaned, embalmed, and treated with honor. Zollicoffer's corpse was eventually allowed to pass through the lines for burial in Nashville. The dearth of actual Confederate first-hand accounts is interesting (in contrast to the many such Federal accounts), but can be explained by the terrain and vegetation. Except where cleared for fields, the battle area was heavily wooded. Even in the winter, these woods can mask vision beyond a few yards. Also, Zollicoffer and his staff rode up out of low ground, through such woods, toward higher ground. It is likely that few, if any, Confederates other than the staff officers actually witnessed Zollicoffer's death or body, and two of the staff witnesses were reportedly killed during the exchange of fire. News

of the general's death can only have reached the main Confederate lines as a vague but terribly true rumor. Later published Southern versions of the event

were likely pieced together from several sources. Zollicoffer never knew Fry and the Federals around him were enemies, while others maintain that he knew his mistake, and was trying to brazen his way to escape.

Col. Fry's Own Accounts

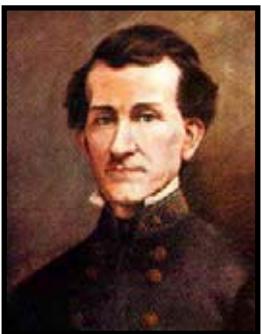
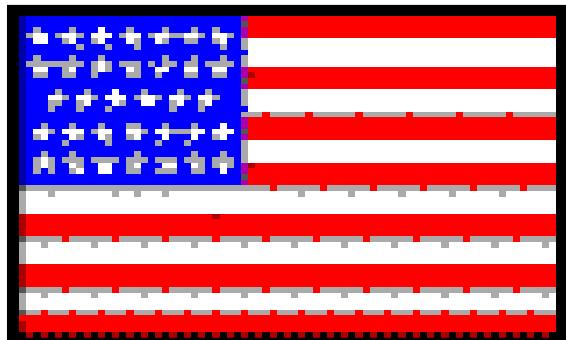
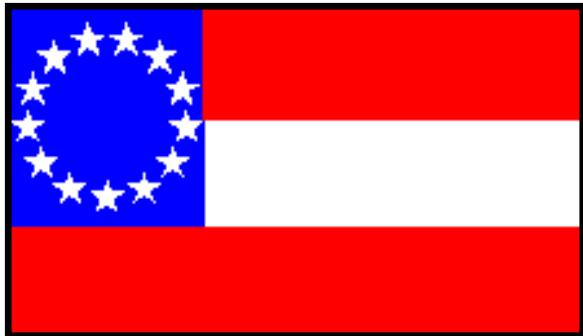
Col. Speed S. Fry generally refrained from taking any sort of credit in killing Zollicoffer, and he always maintained that while he did fire at him, he did not know who he was, and others were firing at the same time. The following accounts are Fry's own, or based on interviews with him. Yesterday I had an interview, of two hours, with Colonel S. S. Fry, the hero of Mill Spring, henceforth to be forever associated in American history with the misguided Zollicoffer. He gave us a description of the battle of January 19th, in which he figured so conspicuously. It differs somewhat from the accounts given by the press. It was not Bailie Peyton who fired at Fry but Lieutenant Fogg, aid to Zollicoffer. Fogg was mortally wounded by Captain Vaughn, of Fry's regiment, and has since died. Zollicoffer wore a light drab overcoat, buttoned to the chin, thus concealing his military rank. He doubtless intended to deceive Colonel Fry, and succeeded[.] Fry was in undress uniform, and, of course, was at once recognized as a Federal officer. They rode side by side several paces, so near that their knees touched. Fry all the time supposing Zollicoffer to be a Federal officer--hence his reply, "I do not intend to fire upon our men." The mistake was not discovered until Fogg fired upon Fry, killing his horse. At once, Fry drew his revolver upon Zollicoffer, shooting him through the breast. Instantly he threw up his arms, fell from his horse, and expired. Zollicoffer's horse was secured by the rebels. His sword is in possession of Col. Fry. He has no other trophies save a note taken from the pocket of Zollicoffer, by which he recognized the rebel General. When he [Zollicoffer] fell a rebel threw down his gun, crept up to Zollicoffer, and was just in the act of taking him up to bear him from the field when he was shot by Capt. Vaughn and instantly killed. Letter dated February 23, 1862, appearing in the Louisville Daily Courier, March 1, 1862 Col. Fry in a letter to the writer gives the following account of the death of Gen. Zollicoffer: "In order to ascertain more certainly the exact state of affairs, the firing having nearly ceased, I rode from the right of my regiment some fifteen or twenty paces down to the fence behind which we had been fighting, and, discovering no enemy in that direction, I turned my horse and rode slowly back to that place I had just left. As I neared the road I saw an officer riding slowly down the road on a white horse and within twenty paces of the right of my regiment. His uniform was concealed, except the extremities of his pantaloons, which I observed were of the color worn by Federal officers, by a long green overcoat. His near approach to my regiment, his calm manner, my close proximity to him, indeed everything I saw led me to believe he was a Federal officer belonging to one of the regiments just arriving. So thoroughly was I convinced that he was one of our men, I did not hesitate to ride up to his side so closely that our knees touched. He was calm, self-possessed and dignified in manner. He said to me "We must not shoot our own men," to which I responded, "Of course not; I would not do so

intentionally," then turning his eyes to his left and pointing in the same direction he said, "those are our men." I could not see the men from my position, but I now suppose they were there. I immediately moved off to the right of my regiment, perhaps some fifteen or twenty paces from the spot on which I met him. His language convinced me more than ever that he was a Federal officer. How it is that he did not discover that I was one I cannot tell, as my uniform was entirely exposed to view, having on nothing to conceal it. As soon as I reached my regiment, I paused, turning my horse a little to the left, and across the road, looked back to see what was going on, when, to my great surprise, another officer whom I had not seen rode out from behind a large tree near the place of my meeting with the first officer, and, with pistol in hand, leveled it directly at me, fired, and paused for a moment, doubtless to observe the effect of his shot. Instead of striking the object at which it was aimed, the ball struck my horse just above the hip bone making a flesh wound. I immediately drew my Colt's revolver from the holster, and was about to fire, when he retreated behind a tree. Not until this time was I aware that I had been in conversation with an officer of the opposing army. In an instant the thought flashed across my mind that the officer with whom I had met and conversed had attempted to draw me into the snare of death or secure my capture by a false representation of his position, and, feeling thus, I aimed at him and fired." Gen. Zollicoffer fell pierced by three bullets, for at the same moment several men of the Fourth Kentucky fired upon him.

J. H. Battle, W. H. Perrin, and G. C. Kniffin, "Kentucky: A History of the State." Louisville: F. A. Battey, 1885, Part 1, p. 393.



Death of Zollicoffer, by Thomas Nast



Brig. General Felix
K. Zollicoffer
The Rebel General



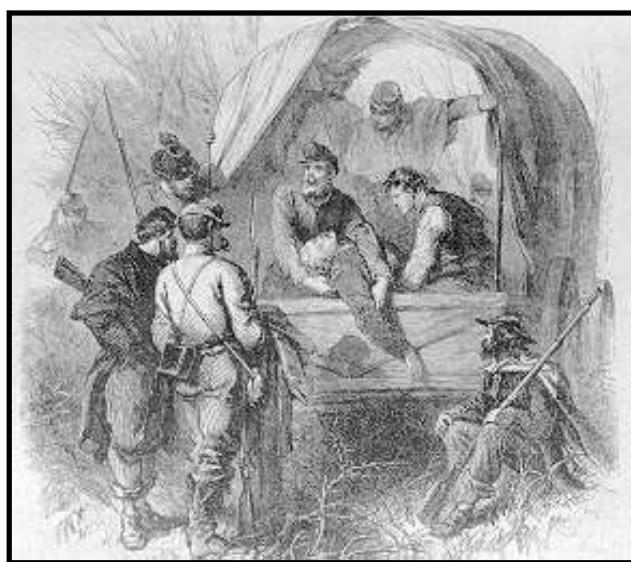
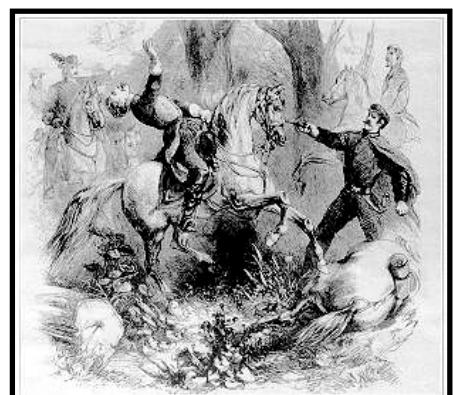
Brig. General Felix K. Zollicoffer
early cdv, shown in
Federal uniform



The death of Gen. Zollicoffer
based on a sketch by A. E.
Mathews, 31st Ohio Infantry.



Col. Speed Smith
Fry
4th Kentucky Infantry



Gen. Zollicoffer's body is placed in a wagon
on the battlefield
Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, Feb. 8, 1862

Death of Gen. Zollicoffer
Leslie's Illustrated
Newspaper, Feb. 8, 1862

Zollicoffer Park -- This park and the surrounding area is the scene of much of the heaviest fighting during the height of the battle. The Confederates attacked up the road from the south and up out of the deep wooded ravine east of the park; the Federals made their main stand along a fence row just north of the park. The battle lines in this area were quite fluid, and it was here that Gen. Zollicoffer rode forward to speak with what he mistakenly thought were his own troops. The fighting here continued over two hours, until Federal reinforcements came up on both flanks of the Confederates, and the Southern soldiers, demoralized by the death of Gen. Zollicoffer and the failure of many of their outdated flintlock muskets to fire in the rain, retreated from the field.

The main sights in the park are the monument to Zollicoffer and his men, the Confederate mass grave mound, the site of the "Zollie Tree," and the memorial cemetery to the Confederate dead. The monument and the mass grave marker were erected by the United Confederate Veterans in 1910. The memorial grave markers for the Confederate dead were erected by the Sons of Confederate Veterans in 1997. The mass grave in Zollicoffer Park is only one of several Confederate grave sites scattered around the battle area.

Just where was the battle of Mill Springs?

The battle took place in western Pulaski County, Kentucky, which is located in south-central Kentucky. The battlefield site is located today on Ky. Hwy. 235, just south of the town of Nancy, which is on Ky. Hwy. 80. You can reach Nancy from the Cumberland Parkway (there is a marked exit about four miles west of Nancy), or you can follow Ky. Hwy. 80 about eight miles west from Somerset is the closest city. Somerset is located at the intersection of the Cumberland Parkway/Ky.Hwy.80, and US27.



Location of the Mill Springs
Battlefield



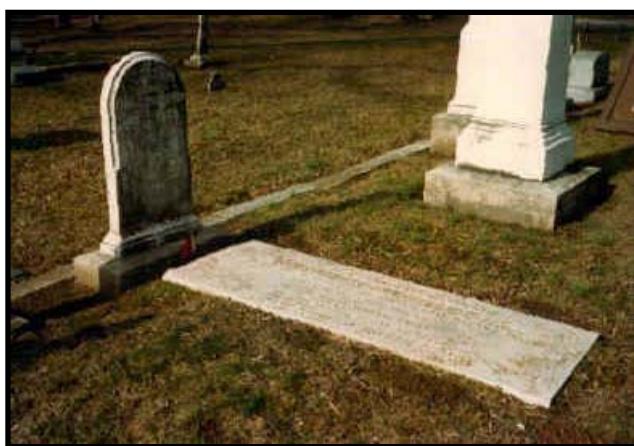
The original "Zollie Tree," a large white oak which had stood for some 150 years, marking the location of Zollicoffer's death, was blown down during a storm in June 1995; a seedling of the original has been planted at the site. For several years the "Zollie Tree" was decorated by a local girl named Dorotha Burton, in memory of the fallen Confederates. This decoration led to the erection of the monuments, and is continued to this day by Dorotha's descendants.



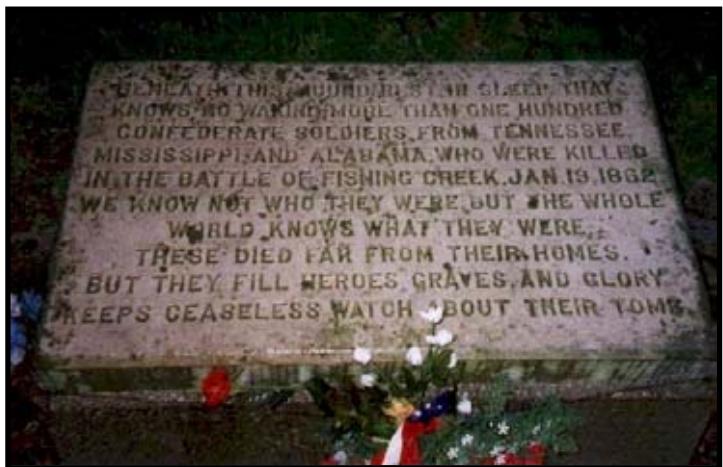
Dorotha Burton Hudson decorating
the "Zollie Tree,"
ca. 1920



Zollicoffer
Monument



Grave of General Zollicoffer
Old City Cemetery, Nashville, TN



Confederate Mass Grave Mound & Marker

Mill Springs National Cemetery, located on KY Hwy. 80 in the town of Nancy, 8.9 miles west of Somerset. Established as a National Cemetery in 1866 (officially brought into the National Cemetery system in 1881), this plot contains the graves of many of the Federal soldiers killed at Mill Springs and other area actions, as well as those of William Logan, who donated the land for the cemetery, and his wife Nancy.

Zollicoffer, General Felix Kirk – Old City Cemetery, Nashville, TN

No relation

b. 19 May 1812, Columbia, Maury Co., TN
d. 19 January 1862, Fishing Creek, Nancy, KY

Wife: Louisa Pocahontas Gordon - Old City Cemetery, Nashville, TN
b. 21 February 1819, Gordon's Ferry, Duck River, TN

d. 13 July 1857

d/o Capt. John Gordon & Dolly Cross

Father: John Jacob Zollicoffer

Mother: Martha Kirk

Brother: Dr. Frederick Zollicoffer



Zollicoffer, Frederick

b. 21 March 1806, Occonome, Halifax Co., NC
d. 26 April 1874, Kosciusko, Attala Co., MS

Wife: Elizabeth "Betsy" Petillo Love

b. 28 December 1812, Maury Co., TN

d. 15 September 1854, Nashville, TN

d/o Draper Love & Susanna Caruthers

Father: John Jacob Zollicoffer

Mother: Martha Kirk

*Notes taken from the book, **Love Letters Vol. 1, by Jolee Love**, pg. 469. Daughter of **John Draper Love** & **Susannah Caruthers** was **Elizabeth Petillo Love**, born in 1812, married 3 January 1830 to **Dr.**

Frederick Zollicoffer, who was born 26 March 1806 in Maury County, Tennessee, and died 1 May 1874, son of a man (**John Jacob Zollicoffer**) who operated a store at Enterprise, Tennessee, and brother of **General Felix Zollicoffer**. Information also from pg. 396 in the book, **Love Letters Vol. 1, by Jolee Love**.
John Draper Love md 12 March 1812, Susanna Caruthers – b. 10 October 1793, Burke Co., NC - d/o Robert Caruthers.

The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution Volume 160

Mrs. Emily West Hays Walker.

DAR ID Number: 159080

Born in Kosciusko, Miss. Wife of B. F. Walker. Descendant of Capt. George Zollicoffer, as follows: 1. Arthur Hays (1847-1917) m. 1874 Alice Virginia Zollicoffer (b. 1853). 2. **Frederick Zollicoffer** (1806-74) m. 1830 Elizabeth Love (1812-53). 3. **John Jacob Zollicoffer** (1775-1840) m. 1803 **Martha Kirk** (d. 1815). 4. George Zollicoffer m. 1774 Anna Lindsey. George Zollicoffer (1738-1815) commanded a company in the North Carolina militia. He was born in Halifax County; died in North Carolina. Also No. 146434.

The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution Volume 102 page 151 [p.151]

Mrs. Mary Mills Johnson.

DAR ID Number: 101500

Born in Kosciusko, Miss. Wife of H. M. Johnson. Descendant of Capt. George Zollicoffer, as follows: 1. Jesse P. Mills (1836-98) m. 2nd Tennessee Zollicoffer (d. 1891). 2. **Frederick Zollicoffer** (b. 1806) m. 1825 Elizabeth Love. 3. **John Jacob Zollicoffer** (1775-1840) m. 1803 **Martha Kirk** (d. 1815). See No. 101343.

The National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution Volume 102

Mrs. Etta Allen Mills.

DAR ID Number: 101343

Born in Attala County, Miss. Wife of W. P. Mills. Descendant of Capt. George Zollicoffer, as follows: 1. Dr. J. W. Allen (d. 1878) m. 1870 Victoria C. Swanson (1852-1910). 2. James Jacob Swanson m. 1837 Ann Maria Zollicoffer (1817-53). 3. **John Jacob Zollicoffer** (1775-1840) m. 1803 **Martha Kirk** (d. 1815). 4. George

Zollicoffer m. 1774 Anna Lindsey. George Zollicoffer (1738-1815) was captain in the North Carolina militia. He was born and died in North Carolina.

Felix Kirk Zollicoffer. FELIX KIRK ZOLLICOFFER was born at Bigbyville, Maury County Tennessee, May 19, 1812; son of John Jacob and Martha (Kirk) Zollicoffer. Attended "old field schools," then Jackson College, Columbia, Maury County. Married at Columbia on September 24, 1835, to Louisa Pocahontas Gordon, daughter of John and Dolly (Cross) Gordon; fourteen children of whom six were sons and two daughters died in infancy, names of remaining six -- Virginia Pocahontas, Ann Marie, Octavia Louise, Mary Dorothy, Felecia Kirk, and Louise Gordon Zollicoffer. After working one year on father's plantation and study one year at Jackson College, entered newspaper work, at age sixteen, at Paris, Henry County, 1828-30; when that paper failed, worked as journeyman printer at Knoxville, Knox County Tennessee, 1831--32; in 1834, became editor and part owner of Columbia Observer; in addition helped edit during these years Huntsville (Alabama) Mercury and Southern Agriculturist; editor, 1841, of the powerful Nashville Republican Banner, state organ of Whig Party; made state printer for Tennessee, 1835.

Zollicoffer served in the Seminole War of 1836, holding rank of lieutenant; after service in military and state office, returned, 1850, as editor of Republican Banner. Adjutant General of Tennessee, 1841-43; Comptroller of Tennessee, October 4, 1843 to October 15, 1849; he served in the Tennessee Senate, 28th General Assembly, 1849-51; representing Davidson County; elected as a Whig to U.S. House of Representatives of 33rd, 34th, and 35th Congresses, serving from March 4, 1853 to March 3, 1859. His influence greatly helped carry Tennessee for the Whig candidate, General Winfield Scott, in the Presidential campaign of 1852 and to secure his own election to the U. S. Congress at the same time. He was a delegate to Whig National Convention, 1852; on State Executive Committee of Whig Party, 1855; State Executive Committee of Opposition Party, 1859; elected, January 24, 1861, a delegate to the peace convention at Washington, D. C., called in vain attempt to prevent Civil War.

Zollicoffer served in the Confederate army; he was commissioned Brigadier General, by Governor Isham G. Harris, May 9, 1861, in the newly formed but poorly organized Provisional Army of Tennessee . (The Provisional Army of Tennessee became the Army of Tennessee under the official C.S.A. banner when the Confederate legislature "nationalized" the state army in late in 1861.)

General Zollicoffer was given command in East Tennessee in effort to check the disgruntled Unionists (a.k.a. Tories) there, and to block any Federal force from taking East Tennessee and eastern Kentucky. It was the policy of the authorities in Richmond to reserve the military stores (food, gun powder, etc.) in Tennessee for the use of the C.S.A. forces in Virginia. Also, since East Tennessee was the poorest food producing area of the state, living off the land was not a good option. Therefore, Zollicoffer's East Tennessee army was both under fed and

under armed. His under supplied army was also thinly stretched across East Tennessee and the Cumberland Plateau, trying to block ever gap and pass.

By 1862, C.S.A. Major General George Bibb Crittenden, had assumed command of the East Tennessee forces, and he ordered Zollicoffer to attack the Federal forces of U.S.A. General George H. Thomas at Mill Springs, Kentucky. The advance toward Mills Springs started on a rainy midnight and the attack started about 6:00 am in the morning of 19th of January, 1862 on Fishing Creek.

In the rain, fog, and smoke, General Zollicoffer mistakenly rode into the lines of the 4th Kentucky, U.S.A. Clad in a white raincoat, his uniform was covered, "... as he conversed with an enemy colonel, neither realizing the other's identify, a Confederate aide rode out of the fog and began firing at the Federals. In the return fire, Zollicoffer was killed instantly. ... The West had lost its first general, who was potentially an able commander."†

General Zollicoffer is buried in Old City Cemetery, Nashville; he is one of Tennessee generals whose figure is carved on Stone Mountain, Georgia. There is a monument dedicated to him near the town of Nancy, Kentucky.

His brother-in-laws, Bolling and Powhattan Gordon, were sometime members of Tennessee General Assembly.

Death of Gen. Felix Zollicoffer

Bibliography

Sources: Warner, Generals in Gray, pp. 349-50; Dictionary of American Biography; Biographical Directory of American Congress; Bond, Family Chronicle and Kinship Book, 144-46, 152, 373-97; Miller, Official Manual, 171; White, Messages of the Governors of Tennessee, V, 697; Tennessee Blue Book, 1965-66, p. 260.

† Connelly, Thomas Lawrence, Army of the Heartland; The Army of Tennessee, 1861-1862, pp. 88-99.

Battle of Mill Springs

Confederates Defense Line

Late in 1861, the Confederates sought to prevent Union forces from occupying strategic points in KY & TN, to maintain rail shipments of vital Confederate supplies from VA, south & west & to set up bases for a future offensive through KY & OH to divide the eastern & western Union states. With those aims, the Confederate defense line was formed from Big Sandy Valley in east, KY through

Cumberland Gap, Mill Springs on the Cumberland River, Bowling Green, on the L. & N. Railway to Columbus, KY on the Mississippi River.

The Forces Move In

Brig. General Felix K. Zollicoffer in November 1861 built C.S.A. bases at Mill Springs & across the Cumberland at Beech Grove, as part of plan. Maj. George B. Crittenden took command, December 13, 1861. On January 11, 1862 Union forces under Brig. General George H. Thomas started from Lebanon, KY to join the Federals under Brig. General Albin Schoepf at Somerset and to attack the Confederate base at Mill Spring. On January 19, 1862 General Crittenden moved out with his C.S.A. regiments, fighting all day to reach the river.

Aftermath

The way was opened for the Union to advance into eastern TN. Lack of provisions, bad roads and difficulty of crossing the river made such advances impractical. General Thomas command joined General Buells' Union force in move on Nashville. This Mill Springs victory with defeat of Brig. Gneral Humphrey Marshall by U.S.A. Col. James A. Garfield in the Big Sandy Valley broke the right section of the Confederate Defense line. Thus began a series of events bringing Union control of KY & upper Mississippi River in first year of war.

(The above appeared on a roadside plaque, just east of Nancy, KY on KY 80 at junction 235. Erected 1965 by KY Historical Society & KY Dept. of Highways.

General Felix Kirk Zollicoffer, 1812-1862, was killed at the Battle of Logan's Cross Roads, erroneously referred to as the Battle of Mills Springs by a marker on the wrong side of the Cumberland. January 19, 1862, was a rainy, foggy time, and Isaac Chrisman, son of innumerable Isaac Chrismans, thought he had killed Zollicoffer. Soon, he brought his rifle to a Wayne County, KY blacksmith shop, and insisted it be forged into a pruning hook, Col. Speed S. Frye of the Union Army was said to have boated of killing Zollicoffer, and the story was told that southern-sympathizing relatives dropped the e from their name so as to show they were no longer kin of the northern branch.

Source: pg. 17, "Seedtime on the Cumberland" by Harriet Simpson Arnold, published by McMillan Co., NY in 1960 and the 3rd printing 1968.