

COL. JAMES COOPER NISBET



Most people today do not know the name of Colonel James Cooper Nisbet. Only rubble remains where the family home once stood in the Cloverdale community near Rising Fawn. But, he wrote a first hand account of the War Between the States, titled ***Four Years on the Firing Line***, which is considered one of the most reliable documents for research into the War.

James was born in Macon and graduated from Oglethorpe University. His roots trace back to the governor of Edinburgh Castle in Scotland. During the summer of 1861, James and his brother John owned a 3,000 acre stock farm in the southern part of Dade County, GA. The brothers drew straws to see which should remain with the property and who should go into the army. John won and enlisted, while James remained on the farm. However, caught up in the excitement of the war, James Nisbet was determined that he not be left out. He organized men in the neighborhood into a company called the "Silver Grays," Company H, 21st Georgia and was elected its Captain.

Captain Nisbet and his company in the 21st Georgia Infantry Regiment performed well during the fighting in Virginia. He spent several months in the army of Stonewall Jackson. He was wounded at Sharpsburg and Cold Harbor. At the end of 1862, he was considered for a promotion to Colonel. In January of 1863, he was ordered to Georgia to raise a regiment, the 66th Georgia Infantry, for General Cobb's Department. Meanwhile, back at home, his farm was occupied briefly by Union General Lytle who stayed in the Nisbet home. Lytle was an honorable Union General and caused no harm to the Nisbets, except for his soldiers digging up the grounds, looking for hidden meat and silver, which they never found.

James Nisbet was stationed down in Atlanta when the Battle of Chickamauga was fought. After Chickamauga, he was ordered to Chattanooga and put in command of a brigade by General Hardee. He was first at what is now called St. Elmo, where before the battle his men swapped tobacco for coffee across the creek with Union soldiers. As the battle began, he moved his brigade up on Missionary Ridge and fought alongside Cleburne's men at the northern end, taking part in the orderly withdrawal to Chickamauga Station and on to Dalton. Cleburne and his men stopped the Federal pursuit at Ringgold Gap and the two armies went into winter quarters – the Union in Chattanooga and Confederate in Dalton. During that winter, Colonel Nisbet was able to move his slaves, at their request, south to Macon.

Colonel Nisbet served under General Johnston, opposing Sherman's drive to Atlanta. Nisbet was captured at Decatur, GA, during the Atlanta campaign in July of 1864 and spent the rest of the war in Federal Prison at Johnson's Island in Lake Erie, near Sandusky, Ohio. It was the only Federal Prison designated for Confederate officers, but held many other Confederates, as well. It had one of the lowest prisoner mortality rates of all the war time prisons.

Colonel Nisbet was released from Johnson's Island in September, 1865, and made his way to Macon, Georgia. He borrowed \$50 from his brother-in-law, and used the money to buy a mule. The animal was later sold for \$75.00, and Nisbet was soon back in the stock business. In early November, he shipped four mules to Chattanooga and decided to go with them. "Chattanooga still wore the aspect of War," Nisbet stated. "Government, Commissary and Quartermaster buildings lined the streets: long, one-story structures, from Market to Broad, and from Market to Cherry, were full of army supplies. Sutler's stores — little, low wooden shanties — were everywhere. Liquor and eatables were sold in them."

Nesbit was glad to leave Chattanooga because right after the war an enormous amount of corruption ran rampant. Back in Dade County, his stock farming proved too difficult without his Negro workers, so he took up wheat farming. A few of his workers eventually came back from Macon and worked for him. Colonel Nisbet's first wife died ten years into their marriage. He ultimately fathered five children by two different wives and even served in the Georgia Legislature and the State Constitutional Convention. He eventually moved to Chattanooga and died here in 1877 and was buried here in the Chattanooga Confederate Cemetery.

Many thanks to Raymond Evans for his help in compiling this short biography of Colonel James C. Nisbet. He supplied me with his chapter on Nisbet from:

E. Raymond Evans, *Civil War in Dade County, Georgia*
Gateway to Chickamauga and the Banner County of the Confederacy,
Dade County Chamber of Commerce
Trenton, Georgia April
2001



J.C. NISBET
CAPT. 21 GA. AND
COL. 66 GA. INF'TY. C.S.A.
