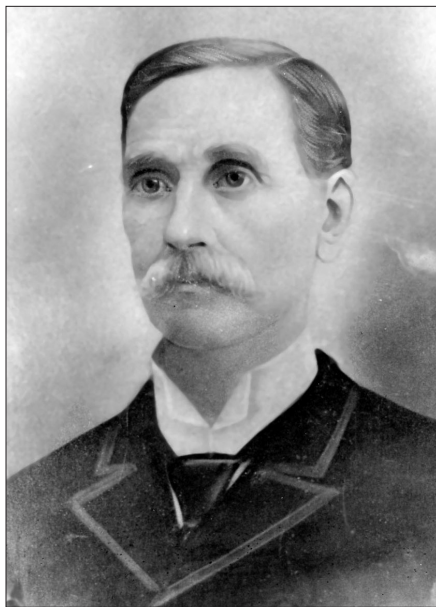


Stories Passed Down

Gary Roberts treasures Civil War memories of his great-grandfather

By Gail Clark



Gary's great-grandfather, John Ball, enlisted in the Confederate Army in 1861.

Gary Roberts of West Richland says he has heard stories about his great-grandfather, John Wesley Ball, and his Civil War days ever since he was a child.

"Both my great-grandfather and my father, Jay Roberts, were great storytellers," Gary says. "At family gatherings, my dad would retell those stories, keeping alive the memories of his grandfather's encounters while serving in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. My oldest brother, who was 10 when our great-grandfather died, also remembered sitting down to hear John spin those tales of his Civil War days."

One of Gary's favorite stories, not edited from the original version, is John's encounter with Union soldiers.

I came over the crest of a hill, riding alone, and down below was a small group of Union Troops. Of course when I appeared they looked up and saw me. I immediately turned in my saddle, took off my hat and started waving it forward as if I was signaling to a group of soldiers that I was scouting for. The union troops quickly jumped on their horse and took off in the opposite direction. I took a chance but it worked.

John Ball was born February 17, 1842, in New Garden, Virginia, into a family of 15 children. He enlisted in the Confederate Army February 5, 1861, and mustered out with the 37th Virginia Infantry Regiment, Company I on August 2, 1862, from Camp Liberty Mills, Virginia. The 37th Virginia Volunteer Infantry Regiment mostly fought with the Army of Northern Virginia.

"I recently found a list of John's brothers and sisters and learned that two of his brothers, Martin and William, were also in the 37th Virginia Infantry Regiment," says Gary. "I recall hearing a story involving John and one of those brothers."

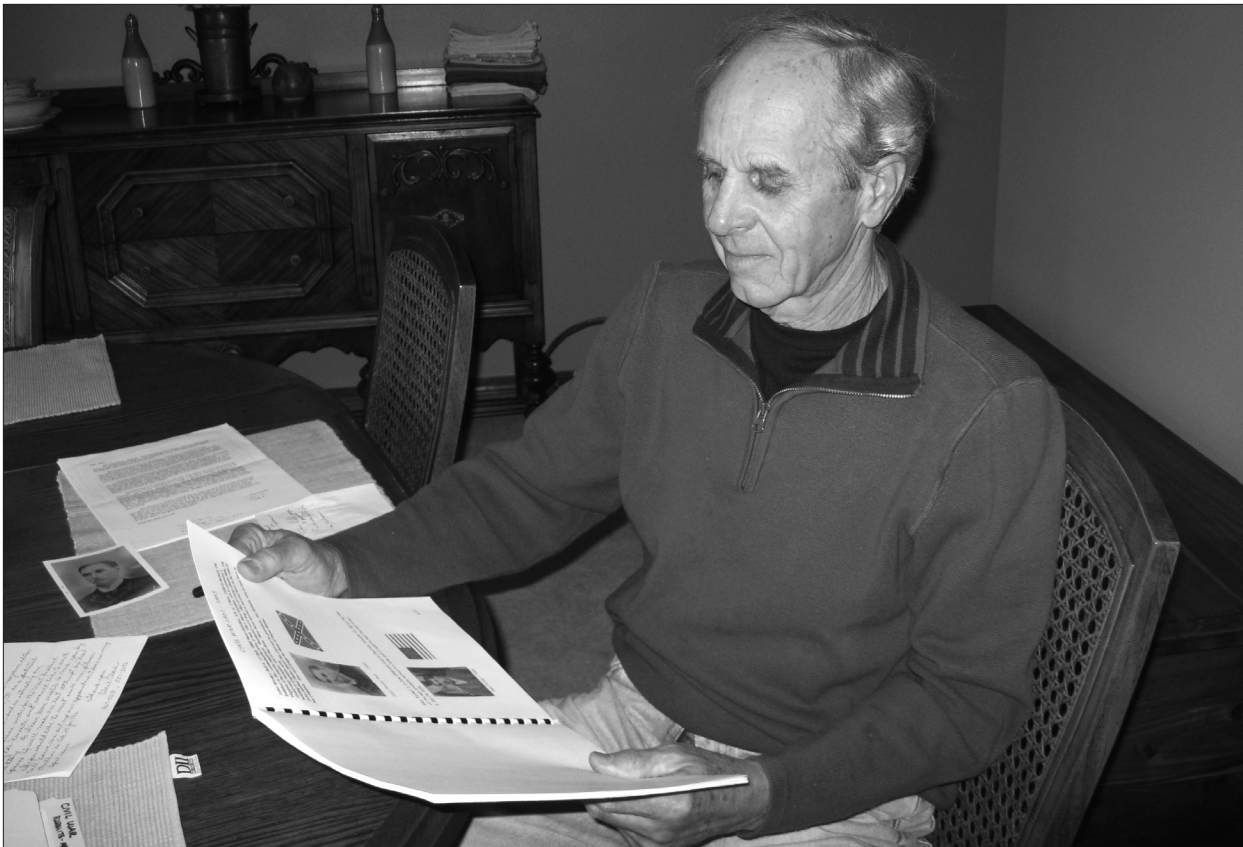
Another time my brother and I were riding along a country road when we had the unfortunate encounter with some Yankee soldiers. By the time we got our horses, turned and were riding away as fast as we could, they were already upon us. One of the soldiers had his sword drawn and was swinging it at me as we raced down the road. I was practically hanging off the saddle opposite the swordsman. I could not get away from him but my brother had a faster horse and was able to get enough of a lead so he could draw his pistol and fire back at them. This slowed them down and we were able to make our getaway.

The 37th was involved in many conflicts, moving with Gen. Jubal Early to the Shenandoah Valley and ultimately participating in the final campaign at Appomattox.

After finishing his service with the Confederacy, John moved from Virginia to Oklahoma, where he died November 7, 1930. He married three times. He and his first wife, Nancy, had one daughter, Gary's grandmother Mary C. Ball.

On one occasion, Nancy helped him elude some Union soldiers. It's not known if John was home on leave, between enlistments or how long he had to stay away. He may have been home on leave and didn't come back anytime soon.

I got married during the war and had a farm in southwestern Virginia where my wife Nancy was living. One day several Union soldiers showed up to take me in. I saw them coming from our house and I



Gary Roberts of West Richland has a treasure trove of writings from his great-grandfather, who fought in the Civil War. Other family descendants include a man who owed George Washington money and a soldier who fought and died with Custer at Little Big Horn.

grabbed my pistols and went out the back door. They came to the house and questioned my wife Nancy of my whereabouts. She repeatedly told them I wasn't at home but they weren't convinced and would not leave.

By that time I had circled around through the woods and came up behind the troops. I climbed upon a rail fence and with my pistols drawn I surprised them. I ordered them to leave and ride off and the first one that turned around or didn't immediately leave would be shot. When there were out of sight I ran for the barn where Nancy had my horse saddled up. I got on and rode off the other way as I was sure they would be coming back as soon as it was to their advantage.

Gary is retired from a career as a researcher at Battelle, so he has more time to collect genealogy information

about his family.

"I had the basic information my parents collected for 30 or 40 years, which is a good foundation for my work," says Gary. "I've also had the help of cousins and continue to find information on the Internet.

"My oldest grandson, who is now serving in the Marines, has a strong interest in family members who served in the military in different wars. He got me thinking I should put all the genealogy information in a booklet, so I now try to have a photo and brief write-up for each person.

"We have a long history of family members serving in the military. In one of our descendant lines, I've traced our heritage to include President George Washington. I've found references to our relative Moses Ball borrowing money from George Washington. When Moses died, included in his will were instructions that the money was to be repaid

to Washington from the estate. Another family member, James Farrand, fought and died with Custer at the Battle of Little Big Horn."

Gary's father was from Oklahoma, but Gary was born in Missouri. His father farmed in Missouri, but moved them to the Tri-Cities when he was young, so he could work in construction at Hanford.

They moved back to Missouri, then later returned to the Tri-Cities, where Gary graduated from Columbia High School.

Because of the overlap in the life of Gary's great-grandfather and those of his father and older brothers, the Civil War never seemed like such a distant history to him.

"I want to keep this history alive for future generations of our family, particularly these Civil War stories as they were kept alive for me," says Gary. ■