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COLUMBUS, Ohio - Towering over rows of neatly arranged headstones at Columbus Confederate Cemetery, a tarnished bronze statue of a Southern soldier stands watch atop granite archway on which the word "Americans" has been engraved.

An inscription on a round, three-foot-high boulder at the base of the arch informs visitors that 2,260 Confederate Soldiers, most of them prisoners of war who died of diseases that swept through Columbus's Camp Chase, located adjacent to the cemetery during the Civil War, are buried within the grounds.

But according to a Columbus man who has been researching biographies of the cemetery's occupants, at least seven of the graves may actually contain the remains of Union soldiers including Pvt. Benjamin F. Fetro, of Clarksburg, and Pvt. John E. Clark, of Morgantown, - who were mistakenly interred with their former foes.

Although Camp Chase started out as a training camp for Union Army recruits, it became : stockade for Confederate prisoners early in the war. According to "A History of Camp Chase and its Cemetery," published in 1906, "the first prisoners of war received at Camp Chase were a party of the 23rd Virginia Regiment who had been captured in the Kanawha Valley. They in were taken [to Camp Chase] on July 5, 1861, and for a time were held as hostages for Union soldiers captured by Confederates."

Dozens of mayors, judges, businessmen and other movers and shakers who lived in what now West Virginia and were believed to have been sympathetic to the Confederate cause were held as political prisoners at Camp Chase early in the war. More than a few died here.

By the end of 1861, the camp housed more than 500 POWs, and at its peak in 1863, briefly held more than 9,000.

Two years after the Civil War ended, Gov. James Cox ordered a military chaplain to identify and record all of the war's dead buried in Ohio. The chaplain, relying on spotty records and semi-legible grave markers in many instances, did the best he could with the information available. He determined that a number of burials in a Columbus city cemetery involved Confederate soldiers, and had those remains re-interred at Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery in 1869.

A number of those post-war reburials caught the attention of Dennis Ranney, who for the past seven years has been piecing together brief biographies of the Confederate Cemetery's occupants.

When he attempted to learn more about a soldier identified as "John Kennedy, 33 Ky. Vols, CSA," buried in the 1869 section, he found Kentucky had no Confederate regiments numbered that high, and could find no John Kennedys who died in Union captivity on the

muster lists of other Confederate regiments from Kentucky. Since Kentucky produced nearly 60 Union regiments and only 9 Confederate regiments during the war, Ranney checked records for the Union Army's 33rd Kentucky Infantry and found a name and service record that matched.

According to 2012 Columbus Dispatch article, Ranney dug up, in addition to Kennedy's Union Army record, information indicating that a Columbus Confederate Cemetery burial identified as James Lykens of Co. A, 12th Ky. Cavalry, CSA, was actually James Likens of Co. A 12th Kentucky Cavalry, USA; that Jacob Lake, Co. G., 90th Tenn. Regiment, CSA, was actually Jacob Lake, Co. G, 90th Penn. Infantry, USA; that J..A. Stilzer, Co. A, 9th Ky. Cavalry, CSA, was actually JW. Stitzer, Co. A, 9th Ky. Cavalry, USA; that Taylor Ellis, Co. B, 1st W. Tenn. Regiment, CSA. was actually Taylor Ellis, 6th Tenn. Cavalry, USA, and that John Clark, Co. G, 3rd Va. Cavalry, CSA, is John E. Clark, Co. D, 3rd W.Va. Cavalry, USA.

More recently, Ranney has found documentation indicating that another Union soldier from West Virginia, Pvt. Benjamin F. Fettro of Clarksburg, a member of the 3rd W.Va. Infantry, is also buried in the Confederate cemetery.

Fettro, like the other suspected Union soldiers Ranney identified, was in Columbus by virtue of the fact that he was a "paroled" prisoner - a soldier who had been captured by Confederate forces, then issued a pass allowing him to report to a Union-operated parolee center where he would be detained as a noncombatant until a prisoner exchange could be negotiated. In addition to serving as a prisoner of war camp for Confederate soldiers, Camp Chase operated a separate facility for paroled Union troops.

Fettro, a 21-year-old, dark-haired Harrison County farmer, according to his enlistment documents, joined Co. G of the 3rd West Virginia Infantry in Clarksburg on June 18, 1861. During the summer, the regiment skirmished with Confederate guerrillas from Philippi to Romney, then spent the remainder of the year doing the same in Braxton, Webster and Clay counties. In March 1862, the unit moved into the highlands of Pocahontas and Randolph counties, and in May, advanced into the Shenandoah Valley and fought troops led by Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson during the Battle of McDowell. In early June, as his company raced through Petersburg, Moorefield and Staunton, Virginia, to take part in the Battle of Cross Keys, Fettro apparently became ill.

While Co. G muster rolls show Fettro listed as "present" in May and June of 1862, he is listed as sick at hospital" in July and August of that year. A November muster report lists him as "absent-paroled prisoner." Subsequent muster entries list him as "reported dead (not official)." An 1864 muster-out list for his unit, which by then had merged into the 6th West Virginia Cavalry, states that Fettro "died at hospital, Petersburg, W.Va., June, 62." But Ranney found a paper trail that indicates Fettro lived beyond June only to die in the Camp Chase hospital in October, 1862. The Camp Chase Hospital admissions book for that month, written in cursive, shows a paroled prisoner, Pvt. Benjamin F. "Fethro" of Co. G of

the 3rd Va., as the unit was also known prior to statehood, being admitted on Oct. 3 for "chronic dysentery" and dying on Oct. 30.

The 1906 Camp Chase history lists a Pvt. Benjamin F. "Fetter!" of Co. G of the 3rd Virginia as G dying on Oct. 31, 1862, then being initially buried in the Columbus City Cemetery, and then re-interred in the Columbus Confederate Cemetery in 1869.

By 1869, few records were to be found, other than the faded wooden headboards from the city cemetery," Ranney said. "The guards and authorities at Camp Chase were gone by the summer of 1865," making it easy for mistakes to be made in the identification of remains, he said.

Ranney thinks Fetro was mistakenly buried as a Confederate because his regiment was listed as the "3rd Virginia" instead of the "3rd West Virginia." The regiment, formed prior to West Virginia statehood, is referred to both ways in Fetro's military records. His name was misspelled on occasion by record-keepers in both West Virginia and Ohio, but apparently appears at "Fetter!" only on his grave marker.

"I believe the hospital records put Pvt. Benjamin F. Fetro at Camp Chase as a paroled prisoner,"Ranney said. "He has the same first name and middle initial and a similar spelling of the surname" as listed in West Virginia records. "He has the same company and regiment as his combined military service records, and one day off on the date of death" between hospital and cemetery records. "Knowing what I know about the other Union soldiers who have Confederate tombstones at Camp Chase," Ranney said, "Benjamin Fetter!' fits 'Benjamin F. Fetro' to a T."

John E. Clark, the other West Virginia Union soldier believed buried as a Confederate at Camp Chase, enlisted for a three-year term in Co. D of what was then the 3rd Virginia Cavalry in Morgantown in September of 1862 at age 23 In December 1862, while the regiment was in the Wardensville area, Clark turned up missing and was initially listed on company muster rolls as a deserter. A later report filed by the U.S. Adjutant General's office listed Clark as a prisoner of war, having been captured near Strasburg, Virginia, in January 1863.

From Strasburg, Clark was taken to a holding facility in Richmond, then on to a parole camp at City Point, Virginia, from which he was sent to another parole facility in Annapolis, Maryland, in February, before arriving at Camp Chase March 22, 1863.

At Camp Chase, records indicate, Clark was assigned to Co. C, 2nd Battalion of a special paroled cavalry unit for Union soldiers awaiting exchange. Less than two weeks later, he was listed dead due to suicide. Camp Chase hospital records show that Clark died of a gunshot wound to the right side.

Ranney believes Clark's affiliation with the 3rd Virginia Cavalry, as the unit was initially known, led to him being mistaken for Confederate when he was re-buried after the war. Under the terms of the prisoner of war parole system then in effect, Clark should not have had access to a weapon, Ranney said.

Ranney, who has been researching the biographies of those buried in the Columbus Confederate Cemetery for nearly 10 years, said it is fitting to remember the two West Virginia soldiers at Thanksgiving, "since our holiday was a child of the rebellion just as the state of West Virginia was."

In proclaiming Thanksgiving a federal holiday Oct. 3, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln said the last Thursday in November should be set aside "as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens," and called on "his almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation and restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility and union." The Columbus Confederate Cemetery, located at 2900 Sullivant Ave., in southwest Columbus, is open daily from sunrise to sunset.