



Harris S. Hawthorne, Medal of Honor Recipient

The Civil War broke out in April, 1861, when a group of Southern secessionists attacked Fort Sumter in South Carolina. Two months prior to the attack, seven states announced their secession from the United States and created the Confederate States of America. The

CSA was never politically recognized by the US or foreign governments and was the primary combatant against the United States, commonly referred to as the Union. The Civil War lasted four years, ending with Robert E. Lee's surrender on April 9, 1865, at Appomattox Courthouse. In that time, 620,000 soldiers died from combat, accident, starvation, and disease.

Harris S. Hawthorne:

Harris S. Hawthorne was born February 29, 1832 in Salem, New York. He married Adelia Gill of Hoosick Falls in Cambridge, New York on February 14, 1854.

Harris was a carpenter by trade and worked for the Walter A. Wood Mowing and Reaping Company for many years. Hawthorne enlisted on August 13, 1862 in Otsego County, New York at the age of 30 and served for three years. He mustered out June 25, 1865, at Hall's Bluff, Virginia. He was a member of the New York 121st Infantry, Company F.

They fought in a few notable battles. The first was May 3rd, 1863, near Salem Church, VA and the second at Spotsylvania Court House, VA on May 10th, 1864.

On April 6, 1865, at Sailor's Creek, VA, Harris is recognized for capturing Confederate General George Washington Custis Lee, the son of General of the Confederate States of America, General Robert E. Lee.

George Washington Custis Lee:

G.W. Custis Lee was born September 16, 1832, and died February 18, 1913. He was the same age as Harris when they encountered each other. He was the eldest son of Robert and Mary Anna Custis Lee. His grandfather, G.W. Custis, was the step-grandson and adopted son of President George Washington and Martha Custis Washington. After the war, G.W. Custis Lee went on to succeed his father as president of Washington and Lee University in Lexington, VA.

The Battle of Sailor's Creek:



The Battle of Sailor's Creek was fought on April 6, 1865, near Farmville, Virginia, as part of the Appomattox Campaign, near the end of the Civil War. It was the last major engagement between the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, commanded by General Robert E. Lee and the Army of the Potomac, under the overall direction of Union General-in-Chief Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant.

The official records read: "War of the Rebellion, Official Record of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, Volume XLVI Part 1 Reports, Serial No. 95, at pages 987 and 988 show in the report of Colonel Egbert Olcott, 121st N.Y. Infantry, the following:

Report of the part taken by the One hundred and twenty-first New York Volunteers in the battle of Sailor's Creek, April 6, 1865: The brigade being in two lines, the One hundred and twenty-first New York formed the right of the first, the Ninety-fifth Pennsylvania being on the left. About 4 p.m., advanced across Sailor's Creek. Remained a short time under the crest of the hill to reform, the creek being quite deep and the crossing difficult. Charged with the rest of the line, drove the enemy, capturing a large number of prisoners. Pressing forward, the enemy were found to be on the right flank of the brigade, the troops on the immediate right having been repulsed. The regiment, by order of Colonel Olcott, rapidly changed front, forming on the road that, crossing the creek, runs nearly perpendicular to the original line of battle. Farther down the road, near the creek, a portion of the Thirty-seventh Massachusetts were striving to hold their ground.

The One hundred and twenty-first New York having checked the enemy, who were endeavoring to get into the rear of the brigade, was ordered to charge, which it did, driving the enemy in confusion, capturing General Custis Lee and several other officers of high rank, together with two stand of colors. General Lee was captured by Private Harris S. Hawthorn, Company F, the proofs of which, there having been some controversy about the matter, accompany this report, marked A. It was near the road mentioned that Captain Howland was killed; no braver or more gallant officers ever carried sword. First Lieutenant Morton was also killed.

The casualties in the engagement were - 2 officers and 7 enlisted men killed, and 1 officer and 12 enlisted men wounded; aggregate, killed and wounded, 22.

The officers of the command displayed, without exception, great gallantry, particularly Captain Kidder, Captain Johnson, Captain Jackson, Captain Van Scoy, First Lieutenant Hassett, and Adjutant Lowe. The names of the men who captured the colors are Warren C. Dockun, and Benjamin Gifford, Company H.

The regiment took at least 500 prisoners.

CAMP IN THE FIELD, VA, April 14, 1865

Private Harris, S. Hawthorn, Company F, One hundred and twenty-first New York Volunteers, being duly sworn, says, that of his own knowledge he is the first person (officer or enlisted man) who seized or captured General Custis Lee, of the Confederate Army, in the engagement of the 6th of April; and that he never lost sight or control of said General Custis Lee until he delivered him up to Colonel Olcott, commanding One hundred and twenty-first New York Volunteers; and that he,



Hawthorn, was one of the men detailed by Colonel Olcott, on account of such capture, to conduct General Custis Lee to the headquarters of General Wheaton, commanding First Division, Sixth Army Corps.

H. S. HAWTHORN.

Subscribed and sworn to, at Malvern, near Burkeville, Va., this 14th day of April, 1865, before me. H. E. HINDMARSH, Lieutenant, Judge-Advocate, First Division, Sixth Army Corps.

The end of the Civil War was approaching soon thereafter. General Robert E. Lee surrendered the last major Confederate army to Ulysses S. Grant at the Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865. The last battle of the Civil War was fought at Palmito Ranch, Texas on May 13, 1865.

Harris Hawthorne's life after the war:

Harris was a member of the Methodist Church in Hoosick Falls. He was the church Steward for over 40 years and in 1894 was elected a trustee of the church. Hawthorne was also a member of the Van Rensselaer Lodge #400, F. & A.M. Harris died on March 23, 1911, at the age of 79. He is buried in Lower Maple Grove Cemetery in the West Side Terrace area.

In 2006, through the work of the Medal of Honor Historical Society, the Hoosick Falls Cemetery Association and the Hoosick Township Historical Society, a bronze plaque, supplied by the government, was installed on the Hawthorne stone.

May 15, 2021, the Hoosick Township Historical Society, through a grant from the William G. Pomeroy Foundation, erected a NYS Historic Marker at the entrance of Lower Maple Grove Cemetery.

“Poor is the nation that has no heroes, but poorer still is the nation that having heroes, fails to remember and honor them.” Marc