

**STRIBLING'S BATTERY, FAUQUIER ARTILLERY C.S.A.
38th BATTALION "DEARING'S" VIRGINIA LIGHT ARTILLERY
COMPANY 'A'**

As summarized from "The Brooke, Fauquier, Loudoun, and Alexandria Artillery", Michael J. Andrus, The Virginia Regimental Histories Series, H.E. Howard, Inc., 1990

The battery was originally recruited as a company of infantry at Markham, Virginia, a tiny station along the Manassas Gap Railroad. The recruitment only took one week – starting on June 22, 1861, and enlisted in Confederate service on July 1. The unit was originally known as the "Markham Guards". Dr. Robert M. Stribling organized the unit and was elected as Captain. James H. Kidwell was elected 1st Lieutenant, and William C. Marshall and William N. Green as 2nd Lieutenants. Several of the members were from old established Virginia families. Sergeant D.M. Mason, was the grandson of Virginia's venerated George Mason, and Lieutenant Marshall was the grandson of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, John Marshall. However, most of the members were farmers from Western Fauquier County.

The first part of July, the company moved to Goose Creek Baptist Church (also known as "Old Stone Church"). There the unit drilled and was outfitted with Mississippi rifles and uniforms made from cloth donated by the county and sewn by the ladies from Leeds Episcopal Church and the Markham area. The physical stature of the unit was impressive since it consisted of fairly large young men with at least thirty over six feet tall.

By mid-July, the Markham Guards were ready for battle. The first assignment of the unit was to guard the Manassas Gap railroad from Front Royal to Manassas. This vital rail line had to be kept open so General Jackson could rapidly move his Valley Division to join General Johnston at Manassas. This mission proved critical to the Confederates at the battle of first Manassas allowing General Jackson's troops to arrive via rail just in time to turn the tide against the Federal forces. During the time of this important first deployment Captain Stribling's wife Mary was gravely ill having recently delivered their first son.

On August 1, 1861, the Markham Guards were ordered to Manassas and once there were assigned to the 49th Virginia Infantry, commanded by Colonel William "Extra Billy" Smith (ex-Governor of Virginia) and re-designated Company G of the 49th. However, this designation was short-lived. With the capture of over thirty pieces of artillery at Manassas, several infantry units were re-designated as new batteries of artillery. Thus, in October, the unit received orders transferring it to the artillery. Re-christened the "Fauquier Artillery", the company received four guns: two unwieldy 24-pounder howitzers and two iron 12-pounder guns. General P.G.T. Beauregard assigned the new battery to General D.R. Jones' South Carolina Brigade of Longstreet's Division. October also brought sad news to Captain Stribling when he learned that his baby son had died. The Battery went into winter camp near Centerville,

Virginia. This first winter would be remembered as the “Good Winter” as the men were close to home and rations were plentiful.

During McClellan’s 1862 Peninsula campaign, the Battery took up its first defensive position at Wynn’s Mill on the Warwick River south of Yorktown. On May 3, 1862, the Confederate commander ordered his forces to fall back and as the Battery pulled out of its position, Federal artillery opened fire initiating the unit in its first contact with the enemy. On May 5, the battery was ordered by the brigade commander, Colonel Micah Jenkins, to take position in the earthworks right of Fort Magruder, in the center of the Confederate line. During the move, the Federals began a vicious attack and the Battery was encouraged “*to hasten to the front that we might be participants in the glory of victory.*” So encouraged they were that they took position a half-mile from the fort and quickly opened fire on the Federal infantry and sustained the barrage until the enemy fell back. They then relocated to their ordered position to the right of Fort Magruder. Sighting two Federal divisions preparing to attack the fortifications, the Virginians opened fire initiating a battle that raged around the fort. Eventually the Federals gave way with the Confederates on the left counter-attacking. The Battery switched from defensive to offensive fire which they sustained until darkness ended the battle.

Stribling’s Battery’s first battle brought them praise from the Confederate leaders. General Longstreet reported that the Battery’s work was “*distinguished for the effectiveness and rapidity of [its] fire.*” General R.H. Anderson, whose brigade bore the brunt of the battle, wrote that Stribling’s guns “*rendered great service against the assaults of the enemy on Fort Magruder.*” His unit, along with the rest of the Confederate force, withdrew back toward Richmond, camping at Burnt Ordinary along the Chickahominy River. While there the Battery was mustered into Confederate service for three years. New elections were called and Captain Stribling remained as the commander; 1st Lieutenant Kidwell left the service, and; William C. Marshall replaced him; 2nd Lieutenant Green transferred to the cavalry; Sergeants Gray Carroll and Thomas Archer were promoted to 2nd Lieutenants.

Later in May, Stribling’s Battery joined the Confederate advance along the Williamsburg Road to Seven Pines. As it neared Seven Pines, the Battery came under Federal fire and Stribling ordered it into position; however, two guns were hopelessly stuck in the mud. The other section rolled into battery south of the road and brought fire on the Federals. Captain Stribling recalled, “*From this position a fire was kept up on the enemy’s lines of infantry . . . Several times [the enemy] got so near that the flash of their guns was almost in our faces.*” Darkness brought an end to the fighting. The Battery lost Private George Pritchard; shot in the throat as was the wheel horse he was driving. The Battery maintained its position during the Battle of Seven Pines and was not heavily engaged.

Remaining in position for three weeks after the battle, Stribling’s Battery was transferred to the North Carolinian Benjamin Huger’s Division. On the morning of June 25, 1862, the Battery was supporting General Armistead’s Brigade of Virginians when it engaged General Joseph Hooker’s Division of the Union Third Corps when it tried to seize a swampy field in front of Huger. The

Confederate forces gave up ground and Lieutenant Carroll with a section of the Battery, went forward in support of the infantry attempting to retake the lost positions. The Federals were driven back to their own starting positions. Though heavily worked, the Battery escaped the Battle of King's School House without casualties.

On June 30, the Battery was attached to General Richard H. Anderson's Brigade and ordered to move toward the battlefield at Glendale. There they received three captured 12-pound Napoleons and one 3-inch ordnance rifle to replace their cumbersome iron guns. The next day, the Battery followed Confederate forces to Malvern Hill but were not involved in the battle which proved costly for General Lee. The Battery remained on Malvern Hill, and on August 4, along with the 17th Georgia from Toomb's Brigade, was ordered on picket duty. On August 5, the Battery repulsed a Union cavalry attack on the Hill, however, more Federals appeared along with two of their batteries. A hasty duel followed at 600 yards. Privates William Sudduth and John Bell fell dead, and others fell wounded including Private Joseph Kendel whose leg was torn off at the thigh by a Union shell. Spying a group of loose horses, he insisted on holding the reins. Lying there in his suffering, the Private called out words of encouragement. A short time later he died with the reins still clutched in his lifeless hands. The Battery made quick work of the Federal batteries. Captain Stribling recalled, "*The Fauquier Artillery gained so decided an advantage that the guns of the enemy would soon have been completely silenced and the men driven from them, had not their infantry been pressed from the front.*" The Union infantry managed to get within 200 yards of the Battery before they were overwhelmed by cannon fire at which time they took refuge in a ravine immediately to their rear. With ammunition chests near empty, the Battery was forced to leave the field. Though little more than a skirmish, this fight at Malvern Hill was the Battery's deadliest of the war (three dead, one wounded, one captured). Confederate Chief of Artillery, General William N. Pendleton, wrote that the Battery "*excelled all others in successful daring.*"

After Malvern Hill, Stribling's Battery was again reassigned, this time to Longstreet's Corps. It was placed in a temporary battalion consisting of Captain Charles W. Squire's company of the Washington Artillery of New Orleans and Captain Samuel F. Chapman's Dixie Artillery. As McClellan's Union forces no longer were a threat to Richmond, General Lee turned north to oppose General Pope's "Army of Virginia". Along with the Battalion, Stribling's Battery engaged the Federal forces across the Rappahannock River. Over the next four hours, the battalion expended 1,182 rounds. Captain Stribling's 3-inch rifle burst and the Federal fire took a heavy toll of men and horses. By 11 a.m., the Battery had expended all of its ammunition and, along with the other batteries of the battalion, withdrew, replaced by fresh units. Stribling's Battery sustained five men wounded (more than ten percent of the 40 men manning the guns). The unit gained more laurels. In his report, Captain Squires wrote, "*It is with great pleasure I am enabled to speak of the gallantry with which Captain Stribling, and his officers and men behaved on this occasion.*"

As General Jackson swung his forces around General Pope's Union flank, Longstreet was ordered to occupy Pope's attention. On August 25, Stribling's, along with several other

batteries, took position opposite Waterloo Bridge on the Rappahannock river and engaged the Union artillery in an extended duel, causing little damage to either side. On August 26, the Battery advanced to join Jackson.

About noon on August 29, (first day of Second Manassas), Stribling's Battery, being attached to General Micah Jenkins' Brigade of South Carolinians, was positioned on the Confederate Army's right flank and began shelling the Federals. First firing on General Fitz John Porter's Fifth Corps, they turned their guns to the left where General John Reynolds' Division advanced. Their guns severely raked them, bringing their advance to a halt. When the South Carolinians joined them, the Federals withdrew to their former positions. General Longstreet wrote in his report that the Battery, *"was placed upon a commanding position to my right, which played upon the enemy's left and drove them entirely from that part of the field."* Captain Stribling remembered it as *"exhaustive work . . . several men were badly wounded and many horses disabled."* The next day, August 30, the Battery was ordered to continue to support Jenkins' Brigade as it advanced toward Chinn Ridge – wreaking havoc on the Federals positioned there. Stribling actually moved his unit further east across the Chinn Branch to Bald Hill. From there he fired into the Federals holding Chinn Ridge. Captain Stribling recalled, *"I have never seen the time when I thought the fire of a battery was more effective than was that of Fauquier Artillery during the contest for Chinn's Hill."* At 6 p.m., the Federals gave way. The Battery was joined by the Loudoun Artillery and a company of the Washington Artillery of New Orleans and they unleashed their fires on the Federal secondary position along Sudley Road. For two hours the three batteries kept up an intense fire until the Federals retreated to Washington D.C..

Being reduced to fewer than forty men, horses in wretched condition, and badly worn equipment, Stribling's Battery did not advance with General Lee's forces into Maryland. They were instead ordered to Winchester, Virginia to refit and reorganize. They received the infusion of 43 men from the disbanded Loudoun Artillery and 40 new recruits. They also received two 24-pound howitzers and four 12-pound Napoleons.

While at Winchester, the Battery missed the Maryland Campaign and the Battle of Sharpsburg. On November 23, they were ordered to camp along the Orange Plank Road west of Fredericksburg. During the fighting they were attached to General Pickett's Division positioned near General Lee's headquarters (a position later known as "Lee's Hill"). Though not directly involved in the Battle of Fredericksburg, their position afforded them an excellent view of the Union assaults against Jackson's line. Stribling's Battery remained in the Fredericksburg area into 1863, and in February, as a result of General Lee's reorganization of his artillery into distinct battalions, became Company A, 38th Battalion, under command of Major James Dearing.

On February 25, General Longstreet was ordered to the Suffolk area in response to a Union threat and to forage for supplies. On April 16, he ordered the Battery into an old fortification known as Fort Huger, or more descriptively, the "Old Fort". The fort was at the confluence of the two main branches of the Nansemond River – the domain of Federal gunboats. Their job

was to ensure none of them passed to assist Union forces in the Suffolk area three miles upstream. The cannon were manhandled into position and recognizing the danger of their position, Captain Stribling brought only 70 men to man the guns. The next day, a Federal gunboat attempted to run past the fort. Captain Stribling described the scene:

“Owing to the unfinished condition of the embrasures, the first one passed unmolested, but the second was plowed through from stem to stern by shot; the pilot house and pilot in it were shot away, and the boat drifted out of range and sank. From that time, an incessant fire was kept up on the battery by the gunboats above and below, and by land batteries and sharpshooters on the opposite side of the river but no gunboats again attempted to run the gauntlet.”

Another Southern diarist left his impression of the action: *“Watched a fight between a gunboat and one of our batteries which was in an old fort built during the war of 1812. Was a pretty sight.”*

On April 19, Federal artillery opened on the fort and the Battery braced for another attempt by gunboats, but no gunboats appeared. The firing intensified all through the day and at 6 p.m. it stopped as 270 Union infantry appeared above the fort. Captain Stribling quickly realized the pickets and skirmishers that were to have been guarding the approaches were not there! The cannoners tried frantically to turn the guns to fire into the attacking infantry but their narrow positions and heavy traverses slowed them. The two companies within the fort tried valiantly to drive the Union infantry away. However, they were eventually successful in slipping to the rear of the fort where they mounted the parapet and rushed into the fort. Five guns and 137 men (55 of Stribling’s Battery) were captured. The men of the Battery not in the fort chafed for the opportunity to drive the Federals away, but it was too dark and the ground unknown. Colonel Micah Jenkins, long associated with the unit, said, *“I feel as though a part of myself had been taken away and if I had been there, I think that I would have retaken the whole.”* Two days later, the Federals abandoned the fort without a fight.

The prisoners were exchanged and paroled two days later at Fortress Monroe. By April 25, the Battery was reassembled. Within a month, after a brief stint at Fort Delaware, the officers would rejoin them. On May 8, the Battery was ordered to Richmond to refit and reequip. There they received six new “Richmond model” 12-pounder Napoleons with caissons and new harnesses. The return to duty was a violation of the terms of parole, a fact that would be heavy on the minds of the men as the war dragged on.

After the Battle of Chancellorsville and the loss of General Jackson, General Lee created three corps from the original two. Stribling’s Battery remained with Dearing’s Battalion along with the Richmond Hampden, Richmond Fayette, and Lynchburg Batteries. The Battalion traveled with General Pickett’s Division of Longstreet’s Corps into Pennsylvania. On July 1, Pickett’s Division remained in Chambersburg securing General Lee’s rear. Receiving orders to move on to Gettysburg, the Battery arrived there the morning of July 3. They were led to their assigned

position in line, just west of the Emmitsburg Pike a few hundred yards from the famed bloody Peach Orchard. Shortly after arriving, Federal skirmishers pressed forward in a strong line and the Battery was ordered by Dearing to deploy and drive them away. Amidst a fire that knocked down several men and horses, the battery opened fire and after twelve rounds from the new Napoleons, the Federals disappeared from sight.

Later, Dearing's Battalion received new orders for participating in the bombardment that preceded the massive frontal assault against the Federal center (Pickett's charge). The batteries were to focus their fires on a small clump of trees just south of Ziegler's Grove, 1000 yards away. During the Battalion's firing, Major Dearing witnessed three Union caissons blow up and three batteries pulled out of line. However, things were still hot for the unit. Stribling's Battery lost four men wounded and ten horses killed; other batteries suffered more. When the barrage ended, General Pickett's Division marched up behind the unit as the cannoneers could only cheer them on since most of their ammunition was depleted. The men watched as the Division swept across the fields in front of the Union line and in less than an hour, being repulsed, the survivors came tumbling back.

By July 24, Stribling's Battery, still assigned to Dearing's Battalion, was again in its old camp near Culpepper Court House. The men and horses were very worn out and in need of rest and proper food. The remainder of 1863, was uneventful for the Battery. When General Longstreet was ordered to Tennessee he left General Pickett and the Battery behind in Petersburg where they spent a lazy and restful winter.

In late January 1864, General Pickett moved his command into North Carolina with the intention of capturing the Federal stronghold at New Bern. On February 1, the Battery, along with 200 infantrymen and two guns of the Fayette Artillery, moved against a redoubt and as they moved, the Federals ran up a white flag. Captain Stribling captured more than 400 prisoners and two 3-inch rifles. This was the only bright spot in Pickett's effort as only two days later he gave up his attempt to capture New Bern and withdrew to Kinston. There Captain Stribling was promoted to Major and reassigned to Cutshaw's Battalion in General Ewell's Second Corps. Lieutenant William C. Marshall was promoted to Captain in his place.

In April, Stribling's Battery moved with General Hoke's Division against Plymouth, North Carolina. With the assistance of the Confederate iron-clad ram, the Confederates succeeded in surrounding the town's Union garrison and attacked on the afternoon of April 19. Joining the charging troops, Captain Marshall led his guns to within yards of one of the Federal redoubts. Unlimbering, the Battery blasted the Federals until they surrendered. Swarming into the fort, the men cast aside their own cannon and manned the captured Federal guns – opening fires on the other parts of the Federal line. Three Battery cannoneers were killed in the action including Private F.W. Powell who fell while carrying his gun's last round of ammunition to his piece.

The next morning, Federal General Wessells surrendered Plymouth to General Hoke. Before he could continue his operation to take New Bern, which Pickett had failed to do, he received new

orders to march to Richmond which was being threatened. Before moving to the Richmond front, the Battery was transferred from the Army of Northern Virginia to the Department of North Carolina and Major John P.W. Read replaced Major Dearing.

Rushing to stop the Federal threat on Richmond, General P.G.T. Beauregard commanding Confederate troops south of Richmond, rushed forces north. Among them was Stribling's Battery. On May 16, General Beauregard launched an attack that drove General Benjamin Butler from Drewy's Bluff into a fortified position on the Bermuda Hundred. After two days of building fortifications and sniping at each other, Butler attempted to recapture lost ground. The men of Stribling's Battery swung into action and the Federals were repulsed. Captain Marshall was wounded and would not return to command until February 1865. Also wounded was Private James Pearson who would die a week later. Lt Gray Carroll took command of the battery to replace the wounded Capt Marshall.

To support General Lee, as he was being confronted by General Grant, General Beauregard sent General Hoke's Division to the historic crossroads at Cold Harbor. Stribling's Battery arrived there on May 31 and immediately a sharp fight developed with the Federal cavalry. More Federals also arrived and the Union Sixth Corps renewed the assault against General Hoke. Outnumbered, General Hoke yielded his position and dug in along the land connecting old and New Cold Harbor. Expecting an attack at any time, Stribling's Battery, along with the Blount, Caskie, and Macon batteries (16 guns and 400 men) dug an impressive series of zigzag earthworks.

The Federal 2nd, 6th, and 18th Corps attacked at 4:30 a.m. on June 3. Major Read's Battalion defended near the center of the Confederate line. (It is thought that Stribling's Battery met and repulsed elements of General David Russell's Division of the 6th Corps.) General Hoke later described Federal dead and wounded being scattered thickly before his position – at no point along his line did the Federals break through.

In the midst of the struggle a priming wire became jammed in the vent of one of the guns. Corporal Charles Sillman jumped atop the gun, *"and with great exercise of courage and wonderful strength, drew out the priming wire and thereby brought the gun into immediate action."* While Sillman survived his feat unharmed, Privates Richard Pearson and James Wortman were seriously wounded.

General Hoke's Division and Stribling's Battery were ordered to Petersburg and on June 15 arrived at Hare House Hill – not knowing that this would be their "home" for the next nine and a half months. So began their participation in the Siege of Petersburg. During that time, the Battery, reduced to 72 men and five guns, endured bombardments and constant sniping by the Federals. Also during this period, they lost many gallant soldiers, *"among them Sergeants John W. Birkby and John H. Fouch, and Privates William H. Harding and George Saunders killed, all excellent soldiers."* Many more were wounded.

In October, Reading's Battalion was again transferred, this time back to the Army of Northern Virginia and assigned to General R.H. Anderson's Corps. Lieutenant Colonel Robert M. Stribling, the former Battery commander, assumed command of the 38th Battalion.

On March 25, 1865, General Lee ordered what would be his last offensive of the war. Hoping to break the stranglehold on Petersburg and free his forces to join General Johnston in North Carolina, General Lee ordered General John B. Gordon with half of the Confederate forces to assault Fort Stedman, directly in front of Stribling's Battery.

General Gordon ordered Lieutenant Colonel Stribling to select two detachments from the Battery and two men each from the other batteries of the Battalion. At 4:00 p.m. Stribling's men closely followed the leading troops as they silently crossed "no-man's land". The Confederates took the fort with little resistance; then the artillerymen manned the captured guns and turned them on the Federals. As they fired the Union guns, other Confederate sorties to capture nearby Federal fortifications failed. The Federals recovered from their surprise and by 7:00 a.m. launched a counterattack which drove the Confederates back. By 8:00 a.m. General Lee saw the futility of continuing and ordered General Gordon to withdraw. Stribling's Battery withdrew to Fort Steadman and by 10:00 a.m. the fighting was over – General Lee's offensive had failed.

At Fort Stedman, the Battery lost three more men. Sergeants Heath Brent and Frank Cable were killed; Private Frank Hoffman was wounded in the throat (he was evacuated to Petersburg and left behind when the Army retreated – Hoffman survived his wound).

During the winter of 1864/1865, a number of the wives of the men in the battery moved to Petersburg to be near their men. In March of 1865, rumors of the evacuation of Petersburg prompted the wives to plan their return to Fauquier County. Passes were arranged for the women and children to pass through the lines on their journey north. A wagon was obtained, to be driven by a former slave to take the women back home. The trip began in terrible weather of freezing rain and snow. Once through the Federal lines the former slave abandoned the women and stole the wagon, leaving the women and children without shelter. After walking some distance the women discovered a pump car abandoned along the rail line to Culpepper. The women hand pumped this car along the line reaching a burnt bridge near Culpepper where shelter was found among friends. This difficult journey home left the women sick and exhausted. Mary Stribling never recovered from this ordeal and died shortly after the war ended.

General Lee abandoned both Richmond and Petersburg marching west on April 2. At Amelia, with Captain Marshall back in charge, the Battery, along with the Battalion, was assigned to Gordon's Corps and on April 6 they participated in a rearguard action near the Lockett Farm on Sailor's Creek. There the Battery lost two guns (the Confederates lost nearly one-third of the Army that day). Captain Marshall managed to extract two guns from the field and on April 8 the remainder of the Battery neared Appomattox Court House.

Leading the Army, the artillery had moved a mile beyond the village on the road to Lynchburg when Federal cavalry under Custer separated them from the infantry. The artillery commanders attempted to rejoin the Confederate forces and maneuvered all night – in vain. On April 9, the artillery marched to Lynchburg.

At Lynchburg, Stribling's Battery reported to General L.L. Lomax. Having received word of General Lee's surrender, he ordered the Battery to lay down its arms and disband. At this time a rumor was circulating in the Confederate army that men who had been paroled and returned to duty would be shot by the Federals. With this in mind the men decided not to surrender with the army and simply go home. Without drama, but no doubt with much emotion, the men started for their homes.

When the men arrived home in Fauquier County they found much of their former lives had been destroyed. Many homes were burned, mills destroyed, farm tools and horses stolen. Even Leeds Church where the decision to form the unit was made had been largely destroyed. Despite all the hardships most of the surviving men decided to rebuild in Fauquier County and their descendents remain there today. In 2001 a new Stribling's Battery was formed by Civil War reenactors and has become one of the premier Civil War batteries on the East coast.

During its term of service Stribling's Battery was engaged in fourteen battles. It lost 12 men killed, 29 wounded, and 40 captured. In the weeks following General Johnston's surrender in North Carolina, 63 men (nearly one-third of the Battery's total war time enlistments) reported to Winchester to receive their paroles.

If the Battery needed or wanted a collective epitaph, Lieutenant Colonel Stribling writing years after the war supplied it:

“In the War, all reward a Confederate Soldier expected was that his manhood should be recognized, for love of home and country was his inspiration. Though he marched and fought with bare feet and tattered clothes, and with nothing but a small ration of corn meal and coarse pork for his diet, and with worthless money for his scant pay, he wrote, in the record of his acts, [that] with . . . bravery and fortitude it is possible for manhood to assert