



The Local Home Guards

Norman Dasinger, Jr., October 26, 2020

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This monument commemorates the fact that Confederate home guards saved the town of Newton, Alabama, from destruction by Yankee soldiers in a March 1865 battle

A fair question not often asked is, what was the role of local home guard units during the Civil War? For an answer, let's examine one unit that existed in the Wiregrass region of Alabama: the Choctawhatchee Rangers.

Organized January 12, 1863, by William Bush, this unit was a typical local Confederate Home Guard Company and had over 40 men in its service. Most of these enlistees were older than 40 and some were in their seventies.

The duties of units like the Rangers were the defense of the home front and provost-type duties that included locating and returning Confederate Army deserters. Due to the sparse population of the area in which the Rangers operated, they were used to capture men who had illegally abandoned the Confederate Army and were hiding in isolated swamps along the Choctawhatchee and Pea Rivers in southeastern Alabama.

Like other home guards, the Rangers contained many of the prominent men in their communities. These patriotic citizens were considered too old or infirm for regular Confederate service. In some other instances entire families served together.

One notable family was the Pates of Dale County, Alabama. Both Jeremiah Pate and his son Green were members of the Rangers. Jeremiah served with his two brothers in Gen. Andrew Jackson's repulse and defeat of Sir Edward Pakenham's British force at the battle of New Orleans, on January 8, 1815. For his service, Jeremiah received a land grant and settled in southeastern Alabama upon his release from the military in 1819. Well before the War Between the States, he was appointed "captain" by Gov. Arthur Bagby and given the responsibility of defending the citizens of the Wiregrass against hostile Indians. He joined the Choctawhatchee Rangers as a 61-year-old United States Army veteran. He died in 1885 and was buried at Mount Gilead Church Cemetery in Geneva County, Alabama. His son Green Pate was 41 years old when he was made 4th Sergeant in the Rangers. Prior to the Civil War, Green assisted in the early formation of Dale County's government. In fact, he served as one the first county commissioners and was obviously well known by the men and women of Dale County. He died in 1901 and was also buried at Mount Gilead.



Gov. Arthur Bagby

Sometimes, when the enemy might happen to move into the local area in which these home guard units served, they became active and necessary participants in military campaigns. For instance, the Rangers played a role in defense against the Union Army's invasion of southeastern Alabama in March 1865. This offensive resulted in the battle of Newton, Alabama, where local Confederate home guards—like the Rangers—saved the town from destruction by Yankee soldiers.

In war, practically everyone serves in some capacity. The home guards in the South were no different.

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