

Name: Rufus Simmonds Also Known As Name: Rufus Simmons

Event Type: Military Service

Military Beginning Rank: Private Military Final Rank: Private Military Side: Confederate

State or Military Term: Alabama Military Unit: 25th Regiment, Alabama Infantry Military Company: D

Note: Original filed under Rufus/Simmons [\[4\]](#)

Company D - St. Clair County

25th Alabama Infantry

- Simmons, Melmoth P., killed at Chickamauga 9/20/1863. Survived by Mary S. Simmons, widow. Other records conflict on date of death
- Simmons, Rufus, deserted 10/2/1863 [NOTE: Having lost first, William, his older brother, and then Mel at Chickamauga, it is no doubt that extreme grief consumed this young man who denied the charge of desertion]
- Simmons, William P., died 12/6/1861 at Barlow's Mill. Survived by Sarah Simmons, widow [\[5\]](#)
- Simmons, Wm. T. Private
- Simmons, George Private
- Simmons, M.P. Private Promoted to 1st Cpl
- Simmons, Rufus Private [\[6\]](#)

Recount of Execution

NOTE:

- No name is mentioned in this memoir, but quite possibly it is about Rufus, although the age of the young soldier is recounted as "about twenty".
- The date of the execution is recalled as early in "February" of 1864

Captain Wilson P. Howell, Howell's History of the 25th Alabama Infantry Regiment, Posted February 17, 1997 by Steven L. Driskell with the disclaimer "This document for personal use only!" See: [\[7\]](#)

5. Chattanooga Campaign by Captain Wilson P. Howell

Fall 1863 ~ Opening of the Historic Campaign of Chattanooga which culminated in the Battles of Chickamauga on 19 September and the fight at Missionary Ridge and Lookout Point November 24th, 1863

I will now relate a tragic and pathetic incident the memory and details of which are vivid in my mind today and has been through the long years which have come and gone since their enactment.

The later part of the year 1863 was the most trying period for our army and desertions were of almost daily occurrence. So much, so that the Confederate authorities began the rigid enforcement of military law and discipline to check if possible these frequent desertions. Just before Grant's assault on Missionary Ridge and Lookout Point, our stronghold, as we thought, **a young man not more than 20 years old** had been court martialed for desertion in the face of the enemy and given the extreme penalty of military law which was death by being shot with musketry. Quite a number of men charged with desertion had been apprehended. Many of whom had been tried by court martial and others whose trial were pending. Just in rear of our line on Missionary Ridge and at the east base of the mountain, the prisoners were guarded.

Having learned of the trial and sentence of the court martial as to the young man of our regiment, and the regiment had never had a commissioned Chaplain and with one exception I was the only Minister in the regiment I felt like I ought to visit the young man who was under sentence of death and talk to him about his soul's welfare.

So I left the line one evening and went over to where the prisoners were being guarded and among the saddest sights I had ever beheld was there.

While there were a number of prisoners under guard the man whom I had gone to see was sitting on the ground chained to a post oak tree surrounded by a line of sentinels with loaded muskets and it seemed that hopeless despair had settled on the face of this young man. A man of my own company was among those on guard. I spoke to him and got permission to talk to the man under death sentence. I approached him and asked if he had been informed of the sentence of the court? And he answered in the affirmative. I then asked if he felt ready to die, he said he was not. He was a man of ordinary intelligence and whose opportunities for culture and moral and mental improvement had been limited.

He seemed to be so overwhelmed with the thought of his coming fate that he seemed not to realize that his soul was in peril. I tried as best I could, to arouse him to a realization of his spiritual peril and assured him by scriptural quotations that there was salvation for his soul through the merits of Jesus Christ. I referred him to the Thief on the Cross who was not only under sentence of death but was being executed for his crime that Christ in response to his praying forgave him and gave the dying man assurance that he was saved.

I had but little time to remain with him. I left him with the promise that I would pray for him and and invoke the prayer of others in his behalf and if possible I would return the next day to see him. The man of my company who was on duty there was a devout Christian and before taking

my leave, I requested him that he would during the night pray with and for him and read the scripture. So I bade him goodbye.

The next morning, I returned according to promise and while I found him sitting in the same place chained to the same tree, I needed no one to tell me that he was a converted man.

Instead of that sad depicted expression on his face he looked so calm and really had a cheerful countenance and on approaching him he very readily said he was a saved man and felt ready and prepared to die. And the man of my company who had spent the previous night there told me he read the bible to him and prayed for him. He was converted during the night.

Before I got through my conversation with him and the guard I heard the attack on our line and hastened back to the front. He with the other prisoners were hastily that night sent off to Atlanta, Georgia and kept there till the following February when the converted man with three others of the Brigade who were also under sentence of death for the crime of desertion were brought back to Dalton, Georgia, where the army was then in camp and were all four executed by being that with musketry.

Shooting 4 men for Desertion

It might not be out of place just here to give a brief account of the military execution of these four unfortunate men. As already stated after the army had fallen back to Dalton, Georgia and in camp there in the winter of 1863-4 four men of the Brigade who had the previous fall been sentenced to death by court martial for desertion were brought back to be executed.

Early **one morning in February**, orders were issued from brigade headquarters to the regiment commanders to have their regiments in readiness to go out to witness the execution of the condemned men.

So at the appointed hour, the entire brigade was marched out about one mile from camp to an old field and formed in three sides of a square. One side being left open. Rude coffins had been prepared for the condemned men and they were taken out of the guard house and the men placed in an army wagon each.

A heavy guard placed around the wagons and they were driven out to the old field and then the four wagons with the prisoner in each wagon sitting on his coffin were driven slowly all around inside the line of the brigade. After which they were driven to the open side of the square and the four men were taken out and were required to sit down on their coffins about ten feet apart facing the square.

Four squads, of nine men each had been detailed to do the shooting. These squads were marched up about thirty feet in front of the prisoners. Then a like number of squads with nine men each came up and took the guns from the first squads and went off and loaded them and returned and handed the guns to the original four squads.

In loading the guns, only part of the guns were loaded with balls, the balance were loaded with blank cartridges. Then an army chaplain offered public prayer.

Then an officer rode up in front of the condemned men and read the charges and specification of the crime and the sentence of the court martial and retired - then an officer rode up just in rear of the men who were to fire the fatal volley (the men holding their guns at shoulder arms) and gave the command Make Ready. Every gun came down in a firing position. The next command was Take Aim. Every gun was leveled at it's victim. The last and fatal command was Fire and in the twinkling of an eye, every gun was discharged and four men lay dead on the field.

It might not be amiss to state just here, that I had not seen the converted man from the time I talked with him in rear of our line at Missionary Ridge in November, till he was brought back to Dalton to be executed. Just after he, with his unfortunate comrades in crime were placed in position to receive their doom, sitting on his rude coffin. I went to him and shook his hand and asked him how he felt about his future, to which he responded in a very calm way and said he was ready to meet his maker. After I had at his request knelt by his coffin and offered a word of private prayer for him and after he thanked me for my interest in his future welfare, I took his hand and gave him a promise that I would meet him in that country, where there is no wars or troubles and bade him goodbye.

Forty-three long years have come and gone since that tragic scene. Yet no event in a life of more than three score and ten years is so indelibly fixed on memory's page as the one I have just recorded. The bodies of these men were placed in their rude coffins and placed in similar graves nearby their place of execution.

I here and now, as I have done heretofore enter my solemn protest against such cruelty. It is in my judgement a species of barbarism which should have no place in civilized warfare. It has been, I know the military law of all nations to give the death penalty to the crime of desertion, especially when done in the face of the enemy when in action. It is the case in the civil courts of the country when a man is brought into court for a crime that involves his life or liberty, if he has no council, the state or court is required to furnish him, so that he may have a fair trial. In military courts in our army this was not so, so far as I observed. I think other means of discipline would be as efficient as to kill men in such a barbarian manner except in extreme cases.