



November 2019

License Plate to the Grave of Two Confederate Deserters



This battlefield preservation supporter parked near the gravesite where two Confederate soldiers, having deserted the Co. E, 5th TN Cavalry, were lynched and buried in 1863. The gravesite is on a privately-owned farm and marked by a small picket fence visible at the edge of the woods, near the upper center of the photo.



Brothers Hiram and Sion, 23 and 21 years old, were buried on a farm a few miles north of Benton in Polk County. The boys were reportedly captured in a nearby field and hung by their halter reins or check lines. Several days later, the badly decomposed bodies were found, the neighbors dug their graves below the trees, then cut off the tree limbs, dropping their bodies into the graves.

The Orr brothers, who were listed as “absent” several months before, were officially declared “deserters” in May 1863. In October 1862 Sion, acting as courier, disappeared while carrying a message to General Reynolds. While this might have contributed to the harsh punishment, local lore suggests the boys had simply returned home to help their family care for the farm. They likely

hid out in the area until Lt. Wm. L. Harbison, previously of Co. D, 3rd TN Mounted Infantry, also from Benton, found them. Military records list Harbison as “Absent on Furlough” at the time the boys were hanged.

After Harbison’s surrender in May 1865 in Georgia, Harbison studied law in LaGrange, GA. When he returned to the “unsettled conditions” in Polk County, he survived an assassination attempt. Harbison left the area, eventually settling in Athens, TN, and practiced law.

When the property owner Jimmy Headrick bought and cleared the property, he found the headstone in pieces. After securing the stone, he repaired and placed it back on the original site. In a recent [Polk County News](#) article, Jimmy shared how “proud he was to help preserve a part of Polk County history.”



Send Us a Photo of Your Plate

Share a photo of your Civil War license plate at a Tennessee battlefield or Civil War site. Email your photo and name of the battlefield or site to info@tcwpa.org. We’ll do the rest. Help tell the stories of Tennessee’s Civil War history.

Complimentary Membership

Not a member of the Tennessee Civil War Preservation Association? After purchasing a Civil War Battlefield specialty plate, you are eligible to receive a complimentary 1-year membership. Visit tcwpa.org/license-plate for more details.



You can purchase the license plate at your County Clerk’s office for \$36.00 plus your regular registration fees. Proceeds from the sale of the plate will help protect and interpret important battlefields in Tennessee.

For more information, visit: tcwpa.org/license-plate

The Tennessee Civil War Preservation Association preserves and interprets Tennessee’s Civil War Battlefields and their contributing landscapes for present and future generations.

Become a member: tcwpa.org/join Make a donation: tcwpa.org/donate Purchase a license plate



Copyright © 2019 Tennessee Civil War Preservation Association, All rights reserved.