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Here is a subject philatelists have been enthralled with for over 100 years.



The Confederate Post

By Patricia A. Kaufmann



Brig. Gen. John Wesley Frazer, POW

U.S. 2¢ blackjack issues (Scott No. 73) are seldom found on prisoner of war covers. The illustrated cover is from a prisoner incarcerated at Johnson's Island with manuscript examined markings. It is a local drop use made particularly desirable because it is addressed in the hand of Brig. Gen. John W. Frazer to "Mrs. L(etitia) S. Frazer, Sandusky, Ohio" Letitia Frazer was there to try to secure his exchange or release.

The Johnson's Island website relates an interesting story about prisoners who thought about leaving with or without being exchanged. One of the group of escape planners was headed by Gen. John W. Frazer. As a result of the escape attempt, Frazer was moved to Fort Warren in Boston where he spent the remainder of the war without exchange.

John Wesley Frazer was born in Hardin County, Tennessee, and attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, graduating in 1849. He was a delegate to the Montgomery convention that organized the Confederate States of America in February 1861. On March 15, 1861, then Capt. Frazer of the U.S. Army resigned his commission and joined the Confederate Army. In May of 1863, he was made a Brigadier General, commanding the Fifth Brigade in the Army of East Tennessee. In September, reinforcements sent to him at Cumberland Gap failed to reach him. Considering the situation hopeless, he surrendered to U.S. General Burnside. Many thought he surrendered unnecessarily.

Frazer was ordered to defend the Gap "at all hazards" by area Commander Maj. Gen. Simon B. Buckner. Frazer began strengthening the fortifications already there to try to block any Federal advance into East Tennessee. After the three-day battle of Cumberland Gap with no blood shed, Frazer was convinced to give up the Gap. Burnside had succeeded in deceiving Frazer by leading him to believe that the opposing Federal forces were much stronger than they appeared. Frazer thought his men were surrounded and outnumbered. Lacking the provisions needed for a prolonged siege, he unconditionally surrendered his garrison. Officially, he defended his actions as a desire to save thousands of lives in the

face of overwhelming odds. As they lined up, the Confederates were shocked to see the size of the force to which they had surrendered.

During this time, the Confederate Congress took up Frazer's nomination to brigadier general. Due to public and political criticism of his actions at Cumberland Gap, Frazer's appointment was rejected February 16, 1864.

As a result of his capture, he was sent to Johnson's Island with other officers. Many northern women, sympathetic to the south, sent boxes of supplies to the prisoners. The ladies frequently included notes of encouragement for whichever of the imprisoned soldiers might receive them. One of these notes fell to Gen. Frazer and he began a correspondence with the sender. Once released at the end of the war, he made an effort to meet with his correspondent and this friendship led to his marriage to Miss Kate Tiffany of Utica, New York, in August 1870. His wife became an invalid and he tended to her until her death.

His last years were those of suffering and pain, having been afflicted with cancer of the tongue. Friends advised him to go to New York City to take a radium treatment, with the hope of a cure. On a stormy night in February 1906, he was struck by a fire engine while crossing 23rd Street and his hip was fractured. Following a series of complications, he died at Bellevue Hospital in March of 1906.

While in the final stages of his last illness, the Confederate Veterans conferred upon him the cross of the Legion of Honor, accompanied by a letter of appreciation for one who had been a faithful and true leader.

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