

# One of our great American Specialties

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



## The Confederate Post

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

### Regimental Surgeon Samuel Van Wyck/ Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest

It's a worn stampless soldier's cover, somewhat sad in condition, as is often the case – but oh the history behind it. It is handstamped "PAID 5" and posted from Clarksville, Tennessee on November 20 or 28 (smudged), 1861. It is addressed to "Mrs. Dr. Van Wyck, Huntsville, Ala" with the mandated pencil soldier's docketing at bottom left "From S M Van Wyck Surgeon Forrest Regt." It formerly graced the collections of late well-known collectors David Kohn and Scott Gallagher.

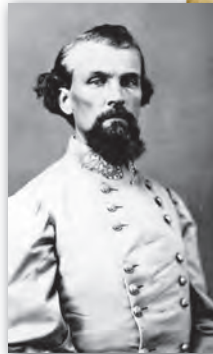
Samuel Maverick Van Wyck was born April 24, 1835 in New York City. He lived in Anderson, South Carolina during his formative years. He attended Yale and Amherst Colleges before attending medical school at the University of the City of New York where he graduated in 1860. He subsequently set up his medical practice in Huntsville, Alabama.

Van Wyck's military record shows that he served as a Regimental Surgeon in the Third Tennessee Cavalry, Provisional Army of the Confederate States (PACS) with Forrest's Cavalry Battalion as of October 28, 1861. Records show he was located at Hopkinsville, Kentucky in November 1861, right over the state line from Clarksville, Tennessee.

Unfortunately, Van Wyck had hardly begun to serve in the War when he was cut down at only 26 years of age. He was murdered (the term used by first-hand reports) by a local citizen while riding next to Lt. Col. (later celebrated General) Nathan Bedford Forrest through Marion, Kentucky. They were returning from a reconnaissance and foraging mission to the Ohio River on November 30 or December 1, 1861. (conflicting sources).

Forrest had learned of threats to and arrests of Southern sympathizers and, while capturing a few of the instigators, Van Wyck was killed. This was shortly after the illustrated cover was posted to his wife and undoubtedly contained one of the last letters he sent to her. Who knows what glory he may have achieved had he not been slain so early.

Nathan Bedford Forrest is one of the most interesting characters in the War on either side. Born to a poor family in Chapel Hill, Tennessee, he assumed responsibility for his family at the age of sixteen, following the death of his father. Despite a mere six months of formal education, Forrest rose from semi-subsistence to planter status. He amassed a fortune estimated at \$1,500,000 as a slave trader and plantation owner before enlisting in the Confederate army as a private June 14, 1861. During the second week of October 1861, he organized a mounted battalion of eight com-



CSA General Nathan Bedford Forrest shown early in the war (at left) and near the end.

panies at his own expense, of which he was elected Lieutenant Colonel.

Forrest was one of the leading cavalry figures of the Civil War with no formal military training. He was one of the very few in either army to enlist as a private and end the war as a general officer. Wiped out financially by the war, he resumed planting and became the president of the Selma, Marion & Memphis Railroad, which he helped to promote.

Forrest once summed up his military philosophy as "War means killing, and the way to kill is to get there first with the most men." Forrest became well-known for his early use of guerrilla tactics as applied to a mobile horse cavalry deployment. He sought to constantly harass the enemy in fast-moving raids, and to disrupt supply trains and enemy communications by destroying railroad track and cutting telegraph lines, as he wheeled around the Union Army's flank. His success in doing so is reported to have driven Ulysses S. Grant to fits of anger. The claim of having twenty-nine horses killed beneath him in battle only adds to his legend

General Forrest founded the original Ku Klux Klan which began as a prankish social organization whose activities were soon directed against the leaders of the Reconstruction government, both black and white. The KKK quickly grew out of hand, being abused by wild youth attempting to use it for purposes of looting and pillage. Forrest disbanded the group and it ultimately died. It was later resurrected by those seeking to use it for hatred and racism in the 1920s, well after Forrest's death.

Nathan Bedford Forrest died in Memphis, Tennessee, where he is buried, on October 29, 1877. By a European authority, he was pronounced the most magnificent cavalry officer that America ever produced. ☒

[Author's Note: In my June column, I noted that the subject cover to Capt. John B. Castleman was addressed to "Melvinville", Tennessee. Sharp-eyed reader Tom Ross correctly noted that this should have been McMinnville, not Melvinville. Thanks Tom!]