

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

Confederate letter with a military address and a sad statistic.

It's a simple folded letter canceled from the UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA/SEP/21 (1861) with a PAID with manuscript rate "10". It is addressed to "Capn. Philip B(arraud) Cabell, Care of Gen. P(hilip) St. Geo(rge) Cocke, Commanding 5th Brigade, Fairfax C. House, Va." - a dynamite military address of the sort that many Confederate collectors seek to acquire. As is often the case, the address has a lot of captivating history behind it.

Capt. Cabell was a volunteer aid to General Philip St. George Cocke, educated at the University of Virginia and from the influential Cabell family. The family papers of the Cabell family, intermixed with many from the Cocke family, number well over 4,000 and are housed in the Special Collections Library of the University of Virginia. They span the years of 1783-1887 and include such incredible documents as a copy of a draft of a report on the the Battle of First Manassas, originally submitted by Philip St. George Cocke to General Pierre T. Beauregard.

Brigadier General Philip St. George Cocke was born on April 17, 1809 and raised in the area of Brems. His father, Major General John Cocke, had made a significant name for himself during the War of 1812. Impressed with the accomplishments of his father, young Philip wished to achieve the same acclaim.

Graduating from the University of Virginia in 1828, Cocke attended West Point Military Academy. Upon graduation, Cocke served in the army for two years, then resigned and returned to Virginia, where he married Sally Bowdoin. Sometime in the late 1820's, they moved to Powhatan County and he became deeply involved in local and state affairs.

In 1859, Cocke became alarmed by the John Brown uprising at Harper's Ferry. He was not alone in his apprehension that such a situation could occur at home. He formed a militia unit to prepare for such a hostility. The famous Powhatan Troop was his organization, and he personally financed, equipped and armed the unit.

The threat of hostilities from within the county never materialized; instead, the hostilities were from Virginia's neighbors to the North. When the Civil War erupted, the handsomely-uniformed and effectively-mounted Powhatan Troop was prepared to go to the action. Cocke was commissioned a general by the State of Virginia; he was briefly separated from the Troop but reunited just prior to Manassas.

Cocke finally had his opportunity for military greatness. Although a brigadier general in the Provisional Army of Virginia, he was made a colonel when the Virginia troops were consolidated with the Confederate Army. This was a profound personal disappointment. For this proud, accomplished man of immense wealth, a depressive state of mind began to consume and erode his emotional foundation.

At the Battle of Manassas, Cocke distinguished himself in battle and valor, but he felt that Confederate General P. G. T. Beauregard did not give him the credit he deserved. A confrontation between the men produced nothing to change the

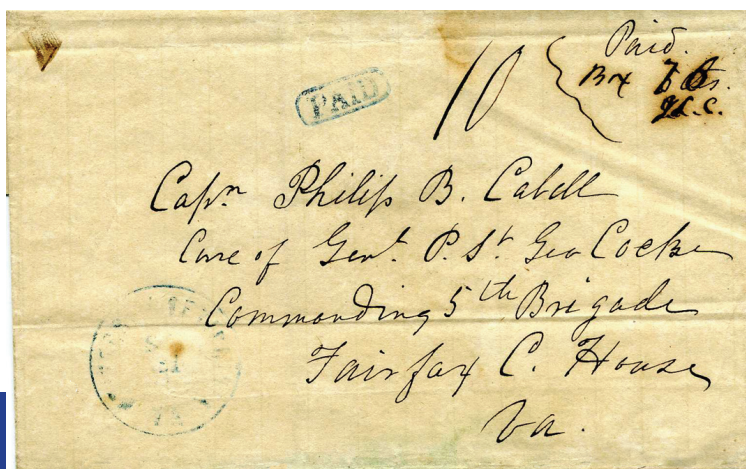
official reports. Cocke found the slight overwhelming, sliding him into mental depression.

After several months, Cocke received a nomination to the rank of brigadier general. This promotion took place in October of 1861; but it was too late. Cocke was emotionally destroyed.

Returning home for Christmas a crushed man, Cocke shot himself in the head the following evening on December 26, 1861, outside his beloved plantation, Belmead. He was the only Confederate general officer to ever commit suicide.

The life of Philip St. George Cocke is quite contrary to the oft defined cause of the Civil War. His father was a champion of emancipation and spent a lifetime in its pursuit. Young Cocke echoed his father's sentiments in his effort to live up to his father's achievements. The method in which he lost his life was a tragedy.

For information on the Confederate Stamp Alliance or the forthcoming Confederate States Catalog and Handbook, write Trish Kaufmann, 10194 N. Old State Road, Lincoln, DE 19960 or e-mail trishkauf@comcast.net. Information is also available on websites csalliance.org and csacatalog.org. ☐



To Captain Philip B. Cabell Care of Gen. P. St. George Cocke, a piece of Confederate postal history with a poignant story to tell.