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EDWARD A. PERRY, YANKEE GENERAL OF THE FLORIDA BRIGADE

By SIGSBEE C. PRINCE, JR.

Florida's Civil War hero, Edward Alysworth Perry, was a transplanted Yankee, born March 15, 1831, on a farm near Richmond, Massachusetts. He was a descendant of old New England stock which had migrated to America in the 1630's. Arthur Perry, the first of the family to arrive in New England, was a member of a militia artillery company in Boston about 1638. From Boston the descendants of Arthur Perry migrated into Connecticut and western Massachusetts. Most of the early Perrys were farmers although some were ministers and a few dabbled in local politics.

Edward's father, Asa Perry, was a prosperous farmer and a local politician of some note, holding several minor political offices. Asa and Philura Perry brought up five children on the old Perry homestead, of which Edward was the fourth. Edward's oldest brother Albertus migrated to New York where he became a successful lawyer. A second brother, George, also went to New York where he became a successful journalist and editor. David, a third brother, followed Edward to Florida after he had served in the Union Army during the Civil War.

Young Edward received his early education in the local school near his home and then went to Richmond, Massachusetts, where he attended Lee Academy; Edward entered Yale in 1850 when he was about nineteen years old, although his older brothers had graduated from Williams College. The future general, remained at Yale two years becoming a firm friend of his southern classmate Billy Maples of Selma, Alabama.

At the end of his sophomore year, Perry went to Danville, Georgia, probably influenced to come South by his college chum, Maples. He remained in Georgia a very short time, moving first to Collirene, and then to Greenville, Alabama. In both of these towns he taught school.

While teaching school Perry studied law and prepared to take the bar examination. A fellow law student was Hilery A. Herbert, who became a member of Congress from Alabama and also Secretary of the Navy under President Grover Cleveland (1893-97). The two became firm friends and Perry married Herbert's cousin, Virginia Taylor.

Perry met his wife through her sister Frances. When he came, to Greenville Frances Taylor was nine years old and he made a pet of the child. According to Frances, Perry arrived in Greenville in 1855 but did not meet his future wife until the next year.¹ They were married in February, 1859, after he had become a successful attorney in Pensacola, Florida.

Perry moved to Pensacola, Florida, about 1856 where he formed a partnership with Richard L. Campbell. The partnership was a successful one and lasted until the storm of war broke on Florida. Perry and Virginia Taylor were married during this time and led a quiet and happy life together until he volunteered to defend his adopted state.

On the eve of the Civil War Pensacola seethed with military activities. Federal soldiers with the stars and stripes overhead held the forts guarding the harbor. A town which normally welcomed the regulars, now presented a hostile front. The young lawyer had a hard and momentous decision to make, for his native state and his family -were loyal to the Union. His wife was a Southerner and he had chosen to make his living in the South. Although it might mean fighting against his brothers, he volunteered his services to his State, the State of his adoption. Early in 1861 he was elected captain of an infantry company known as the Pensacola Rifle Rangers." This company first saw service near Pensacola when they captured the naval base, with Fort Barrandas and Fort McRee. In July, 1861, the Rifle Rangers became

1. Statement, Mrs. Ruby Perry Hottel, daughter of General Perry.

2. *Dictionary of America? & Biography*, XIV, 984.

3. Mrs. Hottel, statement.

Company A, Second Florida Infantry Regiment, and was assigned to the Army of Northern Virginia. The Second Florida was originally composed of ten infantry companies and was placed under the command of a former Whig, Colonel George T. Ward.⁴ The regiment received its baptism of fire in the defense of Yorktown where it was part of General John B. Magruder's force, consisting of about 12,000 men.⁵ The Federal army under General George B. McClellan planned to push the Confederates out of Yorktown and up the Virginia peninsula to Richmond. Magruder was reinforced by General J. E. Johnston, but the Confederates were forced to retreat toward Richmond. In the bitter fighting at Williamsburg, Colonel Ward of the Second Florida was killed leading the attack of the battle-fresh Florida boys. On May 10, 1862, Perry was elected colonel of the Second Florida in Ward's place, first demonstrating his leadership in the seven day fight for Richmond.⁶ On June 30, at Frayser's Farm at the head of his men Col. Perry was wounded and put out of action for the rest of the summer.⁷ During the summer of 1862 the Second Florida was joined by the 5th and 8th Florida regiments in Virginia. These Florida troops fought at Sharpsburg in Major-general Richard H. Anderson's division. Colonel Perry had recovered enough to resume command of his unit in this engagement.⁸

In November the Florida regiments were removed from Pryor's Brigade and organized into the Florida Brigade under the command of Perry, who had been promoted to brigadier-general. This new unit was made-part of Anderson's Division of Longstreet's First Corps.⁹

Perry commanded the Florida troops in two great Confederate victories before illness prevented him from

4. *Soldiers of Florida*, Fred L. Robinson, compiler, Tallahassee (1905).

5. Prince, S. C. Jr., *E. A. Perry*. Thesis, University of Florida, 1949.

6. *Soldiers of Florida*, 79.

7. Parkhill, C. B., "Sketch of General Perry's Life." MS.

8. *Official Records of the Rebellion*, V. 19, Pt. I, 804.

9. O. R. 19. Pt. II, 712. Freeman, D. S., *R. E. Lee*, vol. II, p. 326.

taking part in the Gettysburg campaign., but the Florida Brigade was led by Perry at Fredericksburg (December, 1862) and Chancellorsville (May, 1863).

. . At, Chancellorsville, when General Lee lost his right arm Stonewall Jackson, he was forced to reorganize his army by creating new corps. Perry's brigade was shifted from Longstreet's corps to a new corps, to be commanded by General A. P. Hill.¹⁰

Just prior to Lee's second invasion of the North, General Perry became ill with typhoid fever. The Florida troops were thus commanded by their senior colonel, David Lang, whose normal command was the Eighth Florida Regiment. The Florida Brigade suffered many casualties at Gettysburg, losing about one-half of its effective strength.¹¹

Following the repulse at Gettysburg, the Confederates retreated to Virginia where General Perry, now recuperated, again took command. During the next year, many of the Florida troops wished to go home to recruit more men for their depleted ranks. Most of these troops had not been home for several years and were beginning to give way under the strain. General Lee refused the request for a furlough on the grounds that he could not spare the troops without first having replacements from Florida to take their places.¹²

As the year 1864 wore on, it became evident that the Confederacy was losing the war. The Union blockade was preventing the arrival of supplies from Europe. The South was running low- on new regiments, and brigades could not be kept up to full strength. Perry's men, who had once numbered over three thousand, were down to less than five hundred. The Confederacy had also lost some of its most outstanding military leaders as well as a number of subordinate officers of long military experience. The South could not replace men like Stonewall Jackson, J. E. B. Stuart, and less well-

10. Prince, S. C., Jr., *E. A. Perry*, 38.

11. *Ibid.*, 40.

12. *O. R.* 29, Pt. II, 884-886.

known generals as J. M. Jones and Micah Jenkins. At the Wilderness in May of 1864, General Perry, badly wounded, became permanently disabled for front line duty, thus depriving Florida troops of their gallant leader.¹³

The State now sent reinforcements to the Army of Northern Virginia under the victor of Olustee, General Joseph Finegan. These troops were too few to do much good, however. When the end came at Appomattox on April 9, 1865, the original Perry brigade (three regiments) numbered nineteen officers and 136 men left of the original three thousand.¹⁴

After General Perry recovered from wounds suffered at the Wilderness and it was found that he was no longer fit for front line duty, he was sent to Alabama where he remained until the war was over. He then returned to Pensacola and resumed his law practice.

For the next twenty years, Edward Perry devoted himself to his family, his practice, and to some minor political activity. During this time he did not hold any public offices, but was an active member of the Democratic Party which, during most of the time, was engaged in the struggle to free the state from Radical Republican rule. In 1880 Perry was proposed as a candidate for the governorship and during the campaign was a staunch supporter of W. D. Bloxham who was elected governor.

This period of Perry's life was spent building up his law practice and providing for his growing family. The Perrys were blessed with four daughters and one son. He liked to read and study. His favorite pastimes were playing poker with his friends, and fishing in the nearby Gulf. He was active in civic affairs and was a Mason.

Destructive Reconstruction government in Florida was still fresh in the minds of the people as late as the election of 1884. The regular Democrats, fearing a return of the carpetbaggers, and facing a strong revolt within

13. Mrs. Hottel, statement.

14. *Soldiers of Florida*, 189.

the party, searched for a candidate who might save them from defeat. The party needed a popular candidate who would appeal to the voters, and Perry's war record was not forgotten. Governor Bloxham and ex-Governor Drew were fighting each other for the nomination. Bloxham, because of the Disston sale and Drew because of his actions to kill off Bloxham were a bad risk to the party. The delegates, therefore, turned to General Perry, Florida's war hero. He was popular at home and well-known throughout the State for his bravery and leadership in the war. Perry was faced with opposition within the party of the more liberal elements led by Sam Pasco, but was nominated in the convention on the sixth ballot by a vote of 177 to 114.¹⁵ Pasco in the interest of party harmony moved that Perry be nominated by acclamation. So Perry was the candidate of the regular Democrats for governor. Milton H. Mabry of Sumter county was chosen as Perry's running mate, in recognition of the solid bloc of Democratic votes in South Florida.

A group of dissatisfied Democrats met in Live Oak and chose, Frank W. Pope of Madison as a candidate for, governor.¹⁶ The Republicans in the State, seeing a split in Democratic ranks, elected to support Pope without naming a candidate of their own. Pope's running mate, J. C. Greeley, was a Republican, however.¹⁷

The election was a hotly contested one, and if it had been held in the late summer, Frank Pope might have been elected. As time went on, many people felt that Pope was too friendly with the Republicans. Fearing a return of the Republican regime, many Floridians distrusted Pope and returned to the regular party. Perry's personality, his war record, and his seemingly clean bill of health politically swept him into office. Perry received 32,087. votes to Pope's 27,845.¹⁸ Pope's strength was found in the "Black Belt". counties with their large

15. Tallahassee *Floridian*, July 22, 1884.

16. Cash, W. T. *History of Democratic Party in Florida*, 77.

17. *Makers of America*, Florida Edition, vol. IV, 458.

18. *Floridian*, December 16, 1884.

number of Negro voters. One of the major issues of the campaign was the question of calling a Constitution Convention to draw up a new fundamental law for Florida to replace the carpetbag constitution of 1868. Perry favored a new constitution and the people voted for the convention 31,884 to 8,423.¹⁹

Florida's new governor took over from outgoing Governor Bloxham January 6, 1885.²⁰ The new governor immediately appointed his cabinet which consisted of John L. Crawford, secretary of state; W. D. Barnes; comptroller; C. M. Cooper, attorney general; E. S. Crill, treasurer; C. L. Mitchell, commissioner of lands and immigration; A. J. Russell, superintendent of public instruction; and Perry's old comrade in arms, David Lang, adjutant general.²¹

Perry's administration brought to Florida Civil War veterans a small monthly pension. This pension was first five dollars, but was later increased to eight dollars per month.²²

Perry's administration is remembered for several important changes in the state. The most important was the adoption of our present constitution. This document, with minor changes, has been our fundamental law for over sixty years.

Six new counties were created during Perry's term, bringing the total to forty-five in 1889. The wealth of the state increased much also. In 1884 total assessments amounted to \$60,042,655.²³ Four years later the total assessments for the state had reached \$87,552,447.²⁴ The state treasury showed a balance of \$109,813.08 when Perry turned the reins of government over to Francis P. Fleming, his successor.²⁵

Education, long neglected in Florida, made some steps

19. *Idem.*

20. *Pensacolian*, January 7, 1885.

21. *Ibid.*, February 19, 1885.

22. *Florida Senate Journal* 1887, p. 736.

23. Report of State Comptroller, 1885, p. 14.

24. *Ibid.*, 1889, p. 39.

25. Report of State Comptroller, 1889, p. 3.

forward under Perry. The first meeting of Teachers' and County Superintendents' Association was held in DeFuniak Springs in February, 1886.²⁶ The Agricultural College was established at Lake City, and two normal schools, one at DeFuniak Springs for whites and one at Tallahassee for Negroes, were also established. Rollins College and John B. Stetson University, two non-state supported schools, date from this era.²⁷ Florida's tourist trade got a boost during this time by the construction of such fine hotels as the Ponce de Leon, the Alcazar and the Cordova in St. Augustine. A few months after Perry went out of office in 1889, Henry B. Plant built the famous Tampa Bay Hotel.²⁸

Perry's administration was marked by some of the coldest weather in our history. At Jacksonville the temperature fell to fifteen degrees in January, 1886, and much of the citrus crop was killed or damaged. During 1887 St. Augustine was partly destroyed by fire. One of the worst epidemics of yellow fever ever to visit the state was in 1888.²⁹

On the military side Perry's administration saw the reorganization of state troops under the direction of Adjutant General Lang. Ten infantry and two artillery companies were organized.³⁰

The Legislature of 1887 was to elect a successor to United States senator Charles W. Jones, who was not considered for reelection because of his neglect of duty, due to his ridiculous love affairs. Governor Perry appointed General Jesse J. Finley to fill the vacancy from March 4, 1887, until the Legislature could choose Jones's successor. Former Governor Bloxham and Perry himself were leading candidates and General Finley and S. R. Mallory were considered as compromise candidates, and former Governor Drew was considered as a dark horse

26. Rerick, *Memoirs of Florida*, p. 636.

27. Prince, S. C., Jr., *E. A. Perry*, p. 104.

28. Rerick, *Memoirs of Florida*, p. 364.

29. *Idem*.

30. Report of Adjutant General, 1889, p. 10.

possibility. Finally after much balloting the Legislature chose Sam Pasco, who had been President of the Constitutional Convention of 1885.³¹

Perry's administration saw the further loss of state-owned lands. Much of this land went to railroad companies to support their construction of new lines in the State. The disposal of about three million acres during the Perry administration caused much criticism of the governor. In order to have better control of the railroads and public utilities, the Legislature of 1887 established the Railroad and Public Utilities Commission; and Governor Perry appointed George G. McWorter, Enoch J. Vann and William Himes to serve as the first commissioners.³²

Governor Perry retired to private life on January 8, 1889, and returned to his home in Pensacola. The General's health had been poor for some time prior to the end of his term. In accordance with the belief that he might improve physically, he and his family went to Texas in the summer of 1889. There they visited his sister-in-law, Mrs. Albert Scott, who lived on a ranch near Banderia. He made a trip to Kerrville, Texas, in the adjoining county early in October where, on the fifth of that month, he suffered a stroke. He died ten days later on the 15th of October.³³ Perry's body was returned to Pensacola where he was interred in St. John's Cemetery. The funeral was one of the largest in Pensacola's history. Delegations from all over the state were there headed by Governor Francis P. Fleming, while old comrades in war and in peace as well as former enemies paid their last respects to a gallant soldier, citizen and statesman.³⁴

31. Prince, S. C., Jr., *E. A. Perry*, pp. 108109.

32. *Floridian*, August 4, 1887.

33. *Pensacola News*, October 16, 1889.

34. *Ibid.*, October 19, 1889.