

**THE CONFEDERATE COLONEL WHO COULD HAVE BEEN KING:
THE LIFE OF COL. JAMES HENRY RION**

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This brief biography was extracted from a more complete work in progress by James A. Gabel, a great-great-grandson of James Henry Rion. For further information, or if readers have anything that could add to the story, he can be contacted at 2556 Lindsey Drive, Rapid City, SD 57702-4758, phone at (605) 342-6158 or E-Mail at JAGabel@AOL.COM.

THE CONFEDERATE COLONEL WHO COULD HAVE BEEN KING : THE LIFE OF COL. JAMES HENRY RION

In addition to the title already applied, I could probably subtitle this work, A Biography Under Construction. I've been researching and writing this for about three years now and probably have that much or longer to go before I'm satisfied.

The genesis of this work was a scrapbook of newspaper clippings that Col. Rion kept, beginning in 1850. It was apparently begun at the suggestion of John C. Calhoun, the famous South Carolina Statesman and States-Rights advocate, during a last visit before Calhoun's death. At the same time, Calhoun was supposed to have revealed to Rion a long kept secret about his past.

But, that's getting a little ahead of the story.

Probably the best place to begin an examination of the life of James Henry Rion is with the day of his death. It was on that day that probably the most intriguing legend concerning him took root. Let us see how Dr. Ralph B. Hanahan, his command surgeon during the War, and his family physician afterward, described that final night in a sworn statement shortly after James Henry's death.

"On Saturday 11th Dec. 1886 about 2 o'clock P.M. I was requested by Col. Jas. H. Rion to come down and dine with him as it was the 35 anniversary of his wedding day.

"I reached his house about 3 1/2 o'clock and almost immediately sat down to dinner. There was none but his family present with the exception of myself. I mentioned during the course of dinner that I wished to examine some urine under his microscope, to which he readily assented. After eating we sat around the fire and smoked a cigar, when he directed the microscope to be placed upon the dining table, and it then being near dark he inquired for the lamp which he was in the habit of using and when that was gotten ready he stepped towards the table for the purpose of arranging the instrument. Almost immediately he placed his hand upon his chest over the region of the heart, exclaiming "My what a pain, what a pain. Angina." We seated him on a chair and he leaned his head upon the table for a few moments, when he raised his head from the table the expression was fearful, his skin was white as marble and as cold, while large globules of sweat stood upon his face, and he kept on exclaiming "My what pain, how I suffer." We then laid him upon a lounge near by and I administered different remedies until the brunt of the attack passed off. When comparatively relieved he requested to be raised to a sitting position. Supported on either side by his two sons Willie and Holbrook, he

spoke of the distribution of his property and expressed to Mrs. Rion his wishes regarding it. Mrs. Rion being hard of hearing, it was necessary to repeat to her what was said, and Willie or myself performed that duty. After finishing about his property, He said, "I have a secret, a great secret, I hardly know how to tell it, but I want you to understand that if I recover, it must never be mentioned or alluded to in any way." He then said "I am the son." Willie interrupted him and said, "Yes Father we know."

Let me interrupt my reading of the affidavit here to explain, that what Willie was referring to was the rumor that had been around for many years that Rion was the illegitimate son of John C. Calhoun. The basis of which was Rion's intimate association with Calhoun during his younger days.

But, to continue, "He replied, "But you don't know. I am the son of Louis the XVII. My Father was the Dauphin of France. He was supposed to have died and was buried, but when the grave was examined there were no remains in it. The Duches D'Orleans substituted a deaf and dumb boy in his place and he, bearing the name of Rion (to prevent his being assassinated), was sent to Montreal Ca. My Father lived in Montreal and late in life married a Miss Hunter daughter of Col. Hunter in the British Army. She was uneducated but was a handsome woman. My Father married her, so as to have issue. I was baptized in the Catholic Cathedral in Montreal, and you will find the record among the secret annals of the Cathedral. At my father's death I was turned over to Mr. Calhoun, the then Sec. of War with papers substantiating my claims so that he could prosecute them." He said also that papers substantiating this claim would be found in the records of the Austrian Court. That he did not know of these facts until he was 21 years of age, when he was pledged to secrecy and forbidden to take any steps towards the recovery of his rights unless a French man of war was sent to convey him back. That when he was baptized a glass cross was placed around his neck, that a snuffbox which he possessed surmounted with jewels was once owned by the Duc D'Orleans and that the jewels represented a crown whilst the "O" stood for Orleans, that a ball known in the family as the french ball was one of his play things, that the tureen (silver) had belonged to the Orleans family and that all of these things formed a part of the proof of what he was saying. That by looking in his Bible we would find that the date of his birth and I think his Father's death would be found recorded in Kings I X II.

"He further said that Mrs. Rion had often expressed a wish to have the diamonds in the snuff box set for jewelry, but he directed her not to do so unless there was

absolute need as it was an important link in the chain of evidence. He dwelt upon the importance of these things as evidence and insisted that no effort was to be made by Preston his Eldest Son to establish his claim unless a French Man of War was sent over for him which would be a virtual acknowledgment of the right.

"He stated also that he had always refused any civil office because taking the oath would invalidate his claim, that military honors he was always fond of and did not refuse. In answer to a question as to who would succeed to this right He replied, Preston his Eldest son and after him Jimmie his Preston's son. He was anxious to know if I thought this narrative of his was the result of a delusion produced by Morphine, fear of death or from other extraneous cause. I replied no, that his word was sufficient for me.

"He then dismissed the subject except once again to ask the question if I thought fear had anything to do with it, and then went on to say that he had never experienced the sensation of fear but once in his life, that his passions were controlled by his judgment that he had been in many battles but never had felt fear except once when riding from the lines before Petersburg he experienced a sensation which was different from any ever felt before and he knew it was fear.

"These questions and account of his sensations was to test my opinion of his calmness and accuracy of his statement.

"He was then seized with a chill or rigor and again complained of the chest after heating him with bottles of water and rubbing him, he sank into a sleep from which he could never be aroused. I had laid down near his bed on a lounge to read myself & suppose must have dropped to sleep for after 2 o'clock I knew nothing until I was aroused by Mrs. Rion saying that she believed that Col. Rion was dying. Immediately went to the bedside and placing my hand upon the pulse and found it extinct and his breath came in gasps. I tried to rouse him by injecting him with Ether and shaking him by the shoulder but it was of no avail. At 3.15 o'clock he sank to rest as peacefully and quietly as an infant. I should have stated that it was at 3.15 A.M. on Sunday the 12th of Dec. 1886 that he died.

"On Tuesday the 14th of Dec 1886 he was buried in the Churchyard of the Presbyterian Church at Winnsboro So Ca attended to his last resting place by the Gov. of the State Hon. J. P. Richardson, Genl. Hagood, Judge Haskell, and numerous delegations of different bodies of which he was a member. His funeral

service was conducted by the celebrated Dr. Woodrow and he was laid in his grave by the Masonic Society of this place.

"I have endeavored to set forth all of the paramount facts without going into detail of the last end of this truly great and noble man. I have set down nothing but what I am positive he said and endeavored to give his language as far as I could."

By the way, the Dr. Woodrow that presided at the funeral was the uncle of President Woodrow Wilson.

Except for the barest statements of his birth in Montreal on the 17th of April 1828, shortly after his father's death, no documentation has surfaced to substantiate the stories of James Henry Rion's youth prior to 1841. That was when he entered the Chatham Academy in Savannah, Georgia. Barnard Bee, a fellow student at the Chatham Academy with James, in recounting those days in the early 1840's, did state in a letter after Rion's death, "I think he lived at Mr. Calhoun's before he came to Savannah; he told me a great deal about Mr. Calhoun, but it was so long ago I have forgotten." He also added, "Mr. Calhoun thought a great deal of him. While at Chatham Academy he often received letters from Mr. Calhoun." This is however the only indication of a direct connection at that early a time with Calhoun.

He stayed at the Chatham Academy less than two years having, as one friend put it, "mastered everything to be taught at the Academy. He had completed studies of Algebra, Geometry, and Mathematics comprising Logarithms, Mensuration of surfaces, solids, heights and distances, Trigonometry, Surveying and Navigation; and Caesar, Virgil, and Cicero's Orations and a part of Greek Reader, together with several French works..."

During this period his mother was the housekeeper at the Pulaski House, a hotel run by a Captain Peter Wiltberger. James made such an impression on this old, stern seaman that he became both Wiltberger's friend and advisor, despite his youth. It was from Wiltberger that James received his first real job. Again despite his youth, he was placed in complete charge of another of Wiltberger's enterprises, the only ice house in Savannah, located on Drayton Street.

Showing early signs, however, of traits that would last throughout his life - independence of both thought and action and a desire to forever venture into new fields - he stayed in the ice house for only a short time. He then became the outdoor clerk and collector for a large auction firm. He continued to work there until he and his mother moved to Pendleton, South Carolina in June, 1843. There his mother became the housekeeper at the Old Pendleton Hotel, but by mid-March 1844 had become the housekeeper at Fort Hill, the home of John C. Calhoun.

Soon after his arrival in Pendleton, James entered the Pendleton Academy, which was also attended by John C. Calhoun's three younger sons, John, James, and William. By November, James had completed studies of Conic Sections, Leender's Geometry and more French, under Mr.

Robert Renick, a graduate of West Point. It was then that he made his initial attempt at beginning a military career. He wrote a letter to Calhoun, asking for his assistance in procuring an appointment to West Point. Calhoun immediately forwarded the request to the War Department, and based on being "personally acquainted" with James and Mr. Renick, strongly endorsed the appointment. Alas, James was not successful in his quest.

Just as Mrs. Rion arrived at Ft. Hill, Calhoun had to depart for Washington, having just been appointed by President Tyler to the vacancy of Secretary of State. Mrs. Calhoun also had to depart to be with her sister-in-law during her confinement for childbirth. A confinement that was unfortunately to end with the death of both mother and child. Mrs. Rion was, therefore, left in "charge of the establishment" and the younger Calhoun boys during the parents' absences. She continued in charge of Ft. Hill for the remainder of John C. Calhoun's life, and for some time afterwards.

James continued his schooling at the Pendleton Academy in preparation for his expected appointment to West Point. But events over which he had no control were to deprive him finally and forever of that opportunity.

It was rumored that as a reward for Calhoun's support of James K. Polk in the fall election of 1844, that Calhoun had been promised an appointment for James. It was not to be. Calhoun's relations with the Polk administration began to deteriorate almost immediately.

The first thorny issue to arise was over the policy to be pursued with England over the Oregon Territory. For you students of history, Polk's campaign slogan of "Fifty-four forty or fight" referred to this border issue and the proposed northern boundary far north of the eventual 49th parallel. Before that issue was finally settled by a treaty in 1846, the second issue arose over relations with Mexico.

The United States Army, under orders, had provoked an incident on the Texas-Mexico border on May 9 and by May 13, 1846 war was declared. Calhoun, had been re-elected to the Senate by the South Carolina legislature the previous November, after the incumbent had obligingly resigned. There he had abstained from the vote on the war bill, declaring there was insufficient evidence surrounding reports of the skirmish to support voting for or against it. The rift continued to fester until during the short session of Congress, from December 1846 to March 1847, Calhoun broke completely with the Polk administration over the conduct of the war and its aims.

Calhoun's political career and influence had definitely entered their twilight years. Resigned to the fact that, because of the rift with the President, the Presidential "appointment at large" to West Point would go to others, James began to pursue the study of law under the supervision of Judge Whitner, of Anderson. Then in the fall of 1846, he entered South Carolina College in Columbia, SC. There, through the influence of Calhoun's son, James, he was offered a scholarship by the Clariosophic Society.

James' burden was further eased when, for a year, he was invited to become a member of the family of William C. Preston, the President of South Carolina College. President Preston "made it a rule each year to take two or three young men of promise into his house."

James' residence in the Preston mansion was to have a substantial impact on his later life. Probably most important, it was there that he met Mary Catherine Weir, Preston's ward. Mary Catherine, known to her friends as Kitty, was the daughter of Samuel Weir, Jr., who was the founder and, until his death, editor of the *Southern Chronicle*.

The Weir family had its American roots in Pennsylvania, but Samuel had broken with the family as a young man and moved South. Before his departure, though, he had married Margaret Weaver in 1818. After many years of marriage, Mrs. Weir had enough of Samuel's open and enthusiastic espousal of the Southern viewpoint and left Samuel in Columbia with Kitty and her older brother. She took the younger daughter with her back to Pennsylvania. The brother was soon off to make a life on his own, thus Samuel had only Kitty to look after.

Because of his political leanings and position, Samuel became friends with many of the prominent men of the state capitol. Among these was William Preston, for many years, along with John C. Calhoun, a U.S. Senator from South Carolina. When Samuel died in 1847, Kitty moved in with the Preston's.

On March 31, 1850, John C. Calhoun died. Three days later, James was appointed by the faculty of the college to present a eulogy. When *The Carolina Tribute to Calhoun*, a collection of remarks made in the U. S. Congress after Calhoun's death and other eulogies, was published in 1857, James' was included.

During the summer of that year Rion displayed another latent talent. He returned to Savannah for a visit with Captain Wiltberger. Wiltberger had just bought the country seat of the Tattnall family, the birthplace of the future United States and Confederate naval hero, Josiah Tattnall. He employed Rion to survey the estate, and was convinced by Rion to transform it into a cemetery. Rion then went on to lay out what became know as Bonaventure or Buenaventura Cemetery, a resting place visited for its beauty and serenity even today. Fittingly, it was also Commodore Tattnall's final resting place when he died in 1871.

He graduated first in his class from South Carolina College on Monday, Dec 2, 1850. The quality of his classmates is illustrated by the fact that of the sixty-three men in the class at least twenty-five saw service as officers in the Confederate Army including four future generals.

At the same time, Kitty went North to live with her uncle and aunt. But the romance continued through the mails. Finally, James journeyed to Harrisburg, via Philadelphia, where he was married to Kitty on December 11, 1851. He then took his new wife back to Winnsboro, SC where he had established himself and his mother after his graduation.

On Christmas Day, 1850 it had been announced in *The Herald* of Winnsboro that Rion would become an instructor at the Mount Zion Collegiate Institute in that town, when it opened its new school year on January 27.

When the new term began, James was the Professor of Mathematics and History. It was at this juncture his horizons were expanded to include the military. The Mount Zion Society had decided that the students should be instructed in the military arts as well as the academic. The responsibility for the military department was added to James' duties. He formed the Mount Zion Cadets. On several occasions he even drilled his cadets with elements of the 25th Regiment, South Carolina Militia.

He continued his own education at South Carolina College, culminating in the receipt of a Master of Arts on December 5, 1853. The following day he was admitted to practice in the Law Courts of South Carolina. Then, on May 11, 1854, he was admitted to practice in the Equity Court of Appeals. Six day later, even his military career took a further step forward. He was elected as Major of the Eastern Battalion of the 25th Regiment.

In mid-1855, Rion was involved in an effort in the Fairfield District to organize a Southern Party from members of any and all political parties. He was a member of a committee of fifteen that drafted a Preamble and Resolutions, which were then adopted at the organizations first meeting. While the Southern Party did not come into being, the attempt demonstrated the early seeds of secession were planted and it foretold the split in the Democratic Party vote that permitted Lincoln and the Republicans to win in 1860.

On July 30, 1855, tragedy visited the Rion household. Dr. John C. Calhoun, the 32-year old third son of John C. Calhoun died while visiting his "foster brother." Dr. Calhoun had been living in St. Augustine, Florida for some time, suffering from a long bout with tuberculosis. At the time he was on his way home for a visit. James then had the sad task of escorting the body by road to Fort Hill for burial in the family graveyard.

In November 1856, he was appointed by Governor James H. Adams as a delegate from South Carolina to the Southern Commercial Convention that was to be held in Savannah, Georgia on December 8, 1856.

In July 1857, he stood for election as Brigadier General of the 6th Brigade of Infantry, South Carolina Militia. The 6th Brigade was composed of the 24th and 25th Regiments from Fairfield District and the 26th and 27th Regiments from Chester District. However, he lost by 102 to 80. He may have been the victim of a long standing regional rivalry, as his opponent, was the first Brigade commander to be chosen from Chester in over 30 years. Then in October, he was elected a Director of the Planters' Bank of Fairfield, starting an association that would last and grow for many years to come.

The year did not end well for James. On Thursday, November 5, he shot and killed John A. Player. John Player had been a classmate of Rion's at South Carolina College and had remained a close friend of his after graduation, also moving to Winnsboro.

Apparently, Player had insulted Kitty on the streets in Winnsboro and James had demanded an apology, which Player, for some reason, refused to give. James thereupon pulled a pistol and shot Player, killing him instantly. The approach to this type of an occurrence in those days can be seen by the fact that even though Rion had offered to surrender himself to the authorities immediately after the incident, he was not taken into custody. Finally, on Sunday, November 8, he demanded that he be arrested for the homicide and was taken to Newberry Courthouse, in the neighboring county. There he obtained bail. When the matter went to a Grand Jury on March 29, 1858, the judge had specifically charged them to merely determine if a killing had occurred. Obviously one had, so a "true bill" was returned.

The case came to trial The next day in the Winnsboro Courthouse. After the State Solicitor presented the prosecution's argument, he followed with a statement that would be unacceptable in today's judicial proceedings. He described the part he had to play as painful since both the accused and the counsel for the defense were all his friends. He then made reference to the fact that they had all studied under William Preston, now a judge. He concluded by telling the jury that if, with the facts before them, they could acquit James and, as the paper reported it, "remove the cause that weighed heavily upon him, there was no voice that would swell the acclamations of joy more cheerfully than his own."

The judge in his charge to the jury reviewed the evidence and presented the law. He then stated that in his opinion the highest grade they could possibly find was manslaughter. Moreover, with the facts as presented, they could also bring in a verdict of acquittal - but that was a matter for them to determine, not for him. Not unsurprisingly, the jury was out but about six minutes before returning with a verdict of "Not Guilty." James was a free man.

While 1857 had ended on an unfavorable note for Rion, there had been a positive occurrence. His family had grown over the years, with a son, Preston born in 1852 and daughters Margaret Hunter and Floride Calhoun born in 1854 and 1856, respectively. Therefore, James found it necessary to move into a new house. After he moved into the house, which had only been built in 1855, he enlarged it and employed a French decorator to remodel it. Six metal capped Corinthian columns, imported from France, were installed on the front porch. The entrance doorway had etched satin glass, the molding was hand carved, as was the mahogany staircase. He was eventually to have one of the first private gas plants in Upland South Carolina installed in the house, using the gas in chandeliers in the house and to light outdoor parties.

In September 1858, James and Kitty had another daughter whom they formally named Kitty.

The next year, 1859, was a year of continuing military advancements. As of April 1, he received his appointment as Lieutenant Colonel, to continue in command of the Eastern Battalion, 25th Regiment, South Carolina Militia. Then on October 15, he was unanimously and without opposition, elected Colonel to command the 25th Regiment.

The threat of war was fast approaching and on December 17, the South Carolina Legislature passed a bill, "An Act to Provide an Armed Force," authorizing the Governor to call into service of the state ten regiments of infantry, to be organized from the militia. This was fast followed by the ordinance of secession adopted by the convention in Charleston on December 20, 1860.

On January 5, 1861, the 25th Regiment was mustered and marched to the Mount Zion parade ground. There James made an eloquent appeal to the men's patriotism. After the speech, sufficient volunteers stepped forward to form two heavy infantry companies. The company formed of men from the Eastern Battalion of the regiment, to be commanded by Captain Rion, adopted the name, Fairfield Fencibles, and those from the Western Battalion, Boyce Guards. Included in the compliment of the Fairfield Fencibles was William Cummings, "a free man of color," who volunteered as servant to the company. This is an example of a little publicized fact that blacks served in the Confederate forces as well as those of the Union. They just did not serve in the same numbers or as units.

When the 6th Regiment South Carolina Volunteers was organized from the companies raised in Fairfield and Chester Districts, James was elected to the Colonelcy. He was commissioned and appointed to that position on February 19 by Governor Pickens. The 6th Regiment was composed of ten companies, five from each District, of about ninety men each.

While James drilled and organized elements of his new command, his second son, William Calhoun Rion, was born on March 19, 1861.

By April 11, the 6th Regiment was fully organized and on the train from Columbia to Charleston. The 2nd and 6th Regiments were the first of the 12-month troops to arrive in Charleston, arriving that night. The 6th Regiment were issued their arms for the first time and marched to the battery to serve as spectators to the first shots of the War fired against Fort Sumter the next morning. That evening the regiment was dispersed. James, took two companies to Battery Island, sent another to Cole's Island and two more to Sullivan's Island. The remaining five companies stayed in Charleston.

After the fall of Fort Sumter the Regiment remained fragmented. The five companies that had stayed in Charleston were initially redeployed to Morris Island in support of the artillery batteries commanding the main channel into Charleston Harbor. However, new adjustments were soon made. Eventually, Rion, was headquartered at Fort Pickens, Battery Island, on the Stono River approach to Charleston. With him were five companies. Another four companies, under Lt. Col. Secrest, the second in command, were stationed on Cole's Island. The final company was sent to Fort Johnson on James Island. The command remained fragmented like this until early June.

It was then ordered back to Summerville, to be reorganized and mustered-in to Confederate service. It there came together for the first time as a whole. Here pent up complaints against Colonel Rion, as the symbol of authority and presumed source of any perceived hardship, at last reached his ears. His resolution of what to do was taken in an instant. He called the regiment out, made them a little talk, in which he said the discontent which prevailed among certain of the

officers and men had been made known to him, and although without cause, yet having been elected Colonel by a popular vote of the various companies, he would submit the question whether he should or should not resign to the same constituency. He then called upon all, officers and men, who desired his resignation to step three paces to the front, and those who did not to stand fast. By this plebiscite, his resignation was asked for by a majority of three. He promptly tendered his resignation and returned home to Winnsboro on June 15, resuming his position as Colonel of the remnants of the 25th Regiment, South Carolina Militia.

In the next three months much happened on various battlefields. The Confederate forces had won the first major engagement near Manassas, Virginia, followed it up with additional victories at Wilson's Creek and Lexington, Missouri and had occupied substantial areas of previously neutral Kentucky. However, Union forces had gained a foothold in North Carolina at Hatteras Inlet, had secured northwestern Virginia after successes at Carnifax Ferry and Cheat Mountain, and had arrested many of the pro-secession legislators in Maryland, thus ensuring that state would remain in the Union. It was obvious that the war was not going to come to a quick and peaceful conclusion as many in the Confederacy had thought at first.

James, never one to shirk a perceived duty, decided to raise another company of volunteers and get into Confederate service. On September 28, he assembled the 25th Regiment for drill. Afterwards, he gave a patriotic speech and declared that he was recruiting a sixth company from Fairfield for Confederate service. It was to be called the Lyles' Rifles. Thirty-seven men immediately responded. The task of raising the company was not to be as easy as it had been earlier in the year. By November 13, when it was formally "joined for duty and enrolled," the rolls had only been increased to 77 officers and men, all of whom had served in the Sixth Regiment before it went into Confederate service.

On December 9, 1861, the Lyles' Rifles assembled in Winnsboro and were mustered into Confederate service, departing immediately for Columbia. There it was attached temporarily to the Holcombe Legion. While initially unarmed, because they had joined "For the war," they were able to receive their new Enfield rifles, which were in short supply, shortly after Dec 20th.

James was not the only Rion that answered the call. In May 1861, his mother, Margaret Hunter Rion, had returned from California, where she had been working as a housekeeper in San Francisco, on the same ship as numerous like-minded Southerners, most prominent of whom was Edward Porter Alexander, recently resigned from the U.S. Army, and eventually to become a Brigadier General in the C.S. Army. By August, she was working as a nurse in Midway Hospital, Charlottesville, VA, the first of the hospitals established in Virginia by the South Carolina Hospital Association. She soon became Head Matron of Midway. She continued to serve as Head Matron until she contracted typhoidal pneumonia from nursing a number of cases in the hospital, and, after one short weeks illness died New Years morning 1863. She was buried in the Charlottesville city cemetery, accompanied to her grave site by "all the men from our Carolina hospitals who were able to be out."

In November 1861, Union forces had succeeded in capturing a base for future operations on Hilton Head Island in Port Royal Harbor on the southern South Carolina coast. At the same time

the Union troops were arriving, the coasts of South Carolina, Georgia and East Florida were designated as a Military Department with Gen. Robert E. Lee as the commander.

On 27 December 1861, as part of the realignment of troops to meet the Union threat, the Holcombe Legion was sent to reinforce Brig. Gen. Nathan Evans, who commanded the Third Military District at Adams' Run, just south of Charleston. It was not long before Rion ran afoul of Gen. Evans, a man who gained a reputation for crudeness, conceit and an inability to get along with both superiors and subordinates.

James, along with all the other officers of the Lyles' Rifles were placed under arrest. Once again his sense of honor got him into trouble. After receiving a written order from Gen. Evans "to encamp and man the guns at Pineberry battery." he had responded "I decline to comply" giving as his reasons that "My company enlisted as a rifle company and not a heavy artillery company" and "The number of well men in my company ... is too small to man the battery and perform the picket duty required." Each officer, in turn as the command was passed to him, refused to obey on the same grounds. Gen. Evans requested Courts Martial for them all, stating they had "positively refused to obey my order." A Court Martial was convened on April 29 which found each was "Guilty of the facts as stated, but attach no criminality to the act of disobedience, because a reasonable doubt is raised by the evidence adduced, as to the ability to execute the orders on account of the conditions of his company and the duties required of it."

On 3 March, General Lee had been called to Richmond and was replaced by Maj. Gen. John Pemberton. (Probably best known for surrendering Vicksburg, MS to Gen. Grant in July 1863.) When it came time for Gen. Pemberton to endorse the Court Martial findings, he disapproved of its judgment. In his opinion the evidence showed "these officers have been guilty of a positive and direct disobedience of orders" and that they had not "even attempted to carry out the requirements of the orders." Despite his objections, he went on to order "Having been acquitted by the Court, will be released from arrest and resume their swords." Consequently, on 21 May they were released from arrest.

During this same time-frame, the Lyles' Rifles had become Company B of the 7th South Carolina Battalion. The Battalion was commanded by Lt. Col. Patrick Henry Nelson, who during the siege of Fort Sumter was a Brigadier General of Volunteers. He had lost his commission when all the regiments assigned to his Brigade had gone into Confederate service. He, like James, had gone home and started over again with a new company. However, although officially part of the 7th, as late as June, Rion's company was listed separately in returns for the Third Military District.

On the 29th of March, Nelson's battalion got its first taste of combat as a unit. They participated in a successful expedition with the Holcombe Legion against Union forces on Little Edisto Island. But, other than that, it was a slow spring and summer. However, on the positive side for Rion, Gen. Evans departed for Virginia in July with a sizable part of the command in July, being replaced by Col. (soon to be Brig. Gen.) Johnson Hagood.

It was also during this time that James was to become associated with Dr. Hanahan, who was to be at his bedside when he died thirty-four years later. Dr. Hanahan's family home was being used as the Union Headquarters at the time of the expedition in March. Hanahan, at the time serving as a private in the Marion Artillery, and four other men, had acted as guides for the expedition because of their familiarity with the locality. By July, Dr. Hanahan had been assigned as Assistant Surgeon attached to Captain Parker's Battery of the Marion Artillery near Adams' Run. Rion himself was placed in command of a garrison of infantry and artillery at Church Flats at the juncture of the North Edisto and Stono rivers. Apparently learning from his recent unpleasantness, this time he did not object. As a consequence of these duties, though, he and his company missed out on the Battalion's next action on 22 October, when they were rushed south to stop the first Union foray onto the mainland.

This action occurred only a month after Gen. Beauregard returned to Charleston to replace Gen. Pemberton as department commander.

On Dec 13 the alarm was again sounded, but this time from the other direction. The Union forces were moving inland from New Berne, North Carolina to threaten the railroad communications with Virginia. But, by the time the reinforcement, which included the full 7th Battalion made it to Wilmington, NC the Federals had started to withdraw. Gen. Beauregard had begun to withdraw his troops on 27 Dec, but before half were back the intelligence report came in indicating Wilmington was the next point of attack. Everything was thrown into reverse. Those troops who had not yet left Wilmington, including the 7th, were ordered to remain and most of those that had made it back to South Carolina reboarded the trains for Wilmington. There they remained through the end of January 1863.

The forces that had in fact been planned for the attack on Wilmington had been redirected to Beaufort, SC at the Union base in Port Royal Harbor. The expedition had lost its naval support when an Atlantic storm had damaged many of the Union ironclads, and sunk the famous Monitor. The expeditionary forces were now to be used to support a contemplated attack on Charleston.

But, that plan too called for the Charleston Harbor defenses to first be suppressed by the Navy, and it was going to take time to get the ironclads repaired and into position. As South Carolina waited for the expected attack, Beauregard got his troops back, plus some reinforcements from North Carolina. During the wait also, James received some good news. On 1 April he was promoted to Major, replacing Major Blair, the former second in command of the 7th, who had resigned.

The long awaited ironclad assault began about 3 p.m. on 7 April and lasted just two and a half hours. It was a failure, proving the weakness of ironclads against land forts. Since its success was the keystone of the rest of the plan, with its failure, the rest of the operation was almost immediately disassembled. With the threat to Charleston now diminished, the Confederate forces began to be siphoned off to other theaters.

By July, both the top Union commanders, Gen. Hunter and Admiral DuPont, had been replaced, by Brig. Gen. Gillmore and Admiral Dahlgren, respectively. Furthermore, the battle plan had also been changed from an assault to a siege.

At this time, now Major, Rion was back at his old station at Church Flats with four companies of the 7th Battalion. Lt. Col. Nelson with three companies were at King's Creek and the remaining company was at Simmons' Bluff. The 7th Battalion also had a new Surgeon in place, Dr. Ralph Hanahan. He had passed his examination for promotion in March and been reassigned to the 7th at the end of April.

On July 9th, the first diversionary Union landings began on James Island. Gen. Beauregard, however, had not been fooled and had directed the forces assigned around Adams' Run, including the 7th Battalion, to move as fast as possible to Morris Island where the main assault was expected. Sure enough at about 5:00 A.M. on the 10th the amphibious assault began on Morris Island. The 7th Battalion reinforcements were the only troops to arrive in time to assist the outmanned defenders before they were forced to withdraw to the protection of Battery Wagner by 9:00 A.M. The 7th lost three enlisted men killed and one officer and 10 enlisted missing. Unfortunately, they also lost their colors.

That evening the garrison at Battery Wagner slept on their guns. But, Maj. Rion, with a picket force of 150 men was placed in advance of the battery. At dawn the expected attack was launched. The pickets fired three volleys at the approaching enemy, then retired within the fort without loss. While the lead enemy battalion did reach the parapet, they were not supported and were soundly repulsed.

On 14 July, Gen. Taliaferro, who had that day assumed command of all forces on Morris Island, "determined to make a slight reconnoissance at night to feel the enemy and to add to the confidence of the garrison." He put Maj. Rion in charge of a party of 150 men from various commands. This small force managed to push the pickets and the first reserve "back upon the reserve brigade in such a disorder that the latter fired upon their retreating companions, inflicting a heavy loss in addition to the punishment already inflicted by Maj. Rion."

On the 15th, as part of a planned rotation of troops, the 7th Battalion was replaced on Morris Island and sent by steamer to Sullivan's Island on the east side of the Charleston Harbor channel. They thus missed the next assault on Battery Wagner, the one made famous by the movie "Glory," three days later, on the 18th. That was to be the last of the foolhardy frontal assaults. The besieging forces resorted to digging trenches to approach Wagner. The end for Battery Wagner and the smaller Battery Gregg to its north overlooking Fort Sumter, came on the morning of September 6. But the Union victory was somewhat hollow, for Gen. Beauregard had evacuated both during the hours of darkness the night before. Now began the period of constant artillery assault on Fort Sumter, but no land battles.

Maj. Rion's old nemesis Gen. Evans returned to Charleston in September with his Brigade, after being sent west to reinforce the forces there before the fall of Vicksburg. With him came

trouble. Every one of the regiments in his brigade were in disarray, many of the officers had been absent without leave for some time, and one unit, the 22nd South Carolina, was verging on the edge of mutiny. Then on the 15th, Evans himself was placed under arrest for disobeying an order from his district commander. Maj. Rion was thrust into this environment, when Gen. Beauregard placed him in temporary command of the 22nd.

This was the situation as the troops settled into winter quarters. Over the winter, Beauregard recommended that Rion be given permanent command of the 22nd SC and promoted to Colonel. But Rion apparently declined the offer. One can surmise that he thought the promotion was not worth probable trouble of being assigned to Evans' command again.

By the end of April 1864, as active campaigning began anew, the focus was on Richmond. On September 20 the previous year, the 7th Battalion, had been brigaded with the 11th, 21st, 25th and 27th South Carolina Regiments under Gen. Hagood. But until now the units of Hagood's Brigade had remained dispersed and quiet around Charleston's defenses. Now they were going get into the thick of things. They were first moved to Wilmington, NC where they, on May 4, came together for the first time as a unit. The next day the first units began moving out by train to Petersburg, Va. The 7th was the last to leave a day later.

Because of delays in transportation the 7th and another Regiment missed the Brigade's initiation at Walthall Junction, just north of Petersburg, on the 6th and 7th of May. However, they were there to play a prominent role in the battle at Drewry's Bluff on 16 May. Here Maj. Rion was wounded for the first time - in the right forearm - but remained with his command until nightfall. The severity of the fire they were subjected to is illustrated by the fifty-seven bullet holes in the Battalion flag. In later years, President Davis was to write James remembering that "his gallantry at Drewry's Bluff attracted my official notice and compliments on the field." By these actions, the Confederates had bottled up Gen. Butler's troops in the Bermuda Hundreds peninsula between Richmond and Petersburg.

Gen. Hoke's Division, which included Hagood's Brigade, was moved from the Bermuda Hundred front to Cold Harbor on 30-31 May to help Gen. Lee stop Gen. Grant's push on Richmond. After that Union bloodletting, Grant's attention, and therefore Lee's, was shifted back to the Petersburg front. Gen. Hagood's Brigade was rushed back to Petersburg on the 15th of June, arriving just in time to re-establish an abandoned defensive line east of town along the Appomatox River and the City Point road thus saving Petersburg.

On the morning of the 18th, while Maj. Rion was commanding the Brigade skirmishers in front of this position, he was once again wounded - this time in the left forearm. But as before, he remained in the field until nightfall. However, this time he was compelled to go to the hospital. He went first to the field hospital, then the general hospital in Richmond, and finally the Episcopal Church Hospital in Williamsburg. Eventually, on June 20, he was sent home to recuperate, not returning to the Battalion until 22 August.

While he was absent, Lt. Col. Nelson, lead a command of skirmishers spearheading an attack on 24 June. The attack was a disaster and Nelson was missing when Hagood's troops returned to their lines.

After James returned, the command was pulled out of the Petersburg trenches, on 28 September, and sent back north of the James River as a result of Union forces taking Fort Harrison on the Richmond defensive line. After some inconsequential thrusts and parries, both side constructed their winter quarters.

It was while in these winter quarters, that Maj. Rion officially became Lt. Col. Rion and the commander of the 7th Battalion. His appointment was dated 22 November, but his date of rank was retroactive to June 24, the day Lt. Col. Nelson was lost.

This was not destined to be a quiet winter though. On 21 December, the Brigade, as part of Hoke's Division of Gen. Longstreet Corps was pulled out of the lines. It destination, once again, was Wilmington, NC via Richmond and Danville, VA then to Goldsboro, NC. They finally arrived in Wilmington on the 26th and were rushed by steamer to the vicinity of Fort Fisher at the head of the Cape Fear River.

The cause of the movement was a half-hearted effort by Gen. Butler to take Fort Fisher and thereby close Wilmington, the Confederacy's last major port. Even before the reinforcements had arrived the effort had failed, so the troops were moved back to Wilmington on the 31st.

Gen. Butler was finally relieved of command, and a fresh attempt was launched on the 13th of Jan. While Fort Fisher was being bombarded, Gen. Hagood was ordered to put the 11th, 21st, 25th Regiments and the 7th Battalion into the fort. Because of the grounding of the transports in the river only the 21st and 25th were successful, and most were captured when the Fort fell.

After fighting a number of delaying battles up the river bank, Wilmington was evacuated on February 22. Then, on March 5th, Hoke's Division was rushed by rail to Kinston to intercept another Union advance from New Berne. Hagood's command at this time had been reorganized into a brigade consisting of two regiments and a battalion. One of these regiments, commanded by Lt. Col. Rion, was essentially the remnants of Hagood's old brigade. All told, twelve companies and about 500 men total.

On 8 March, Hoke successfully attacked the approaching Union force, capturing 1,000 prisoners with an additional 500 dead and wounded. The Union force then strongly entrenched and no further action on that front transpired. By the 11th, the necessity to concentrate all the available Confederate forces in North Carolina to confront Gen. Sherman's advance, caused the Confederate troops at Kinston to begin to withdraw. Hagood's brigade remained there for another three days before they began their withdrawal to Smithfield, northwest of Goldsboro, arriving there the 16th.

The battle of Averysboro that day had prompted Gen. Sherman to stop his advance toward Smithfield and redirect his movements toward Goldsboro. To counter this move, Gen. Johnston moved his army to the vicinity of Bentonville. The first Union assault on the 19th hit the portion of the Confederate line held by Gen. Kirkland's Brigade and that portion of Hagood's Brigade under Rion's command. The front held and the Confederates counterattacked. Over the next two days, Gen. Sherman tried several approaches to turning Johnson's position but failed. Then on 22 March, Johnson began withdrawing unmolested from his lines. Hoke's Division again bringing up the rear.

Gen. Sherman moved on to Goldsboro and linked up with his columns coming from New Berne and Wilmington. The Confederate army went into camp at Smithfield again. Here Gen. Hagood was ordered to go back to South Carolina in an attempt to round up the officers and men of the brigade that had been long absent for various good and bad reasons. He expected to be gone for about 40 days and left Lt. Col. Rion in command. By this time the old brigade numbered only 493 men.

Gen. Johnston began to move the army again on the 10th of April and they continued to move almost every day until they arrived in the vicinity of Trinity, NC on the 27th. During this time the news of Gen. Lee's surrender at Appomatox reached them and demoralization took a heavy toll. At Trinity the official orders arrived announcing they too would be surrendered. The paperwork kept the troops in camp until May 3rd at 8:00 a.m. when they began their march to Lancaster Courthouse, SC, their designated mustering-out point. By this time the Brigade's ranks had dwindled to less than 200. By 11:00 a.m. on May 5th, they reached Lancaster. The paroles that had been carried from Greensboro were passed out and the Brigade ceased to exist.

James returned to his law practice which prospered and he immersed himself in both politics and commercial enterprises. He did have one more brief brush with the military service before he moved on with his civilian life. By General Order No. 1, dated Dec 22, 1865, he was appointed once again to command of the 25th Regiment, 6th Brigade, 3rd Division of the reorganized South Carolina Militia. He began to perfect the Regiment's reorganization by publishing Regimental General Order. No 1, on 6 February 1866. But that's about as far as it went. Under reconstruction laws this militia never came to pass, first being replaced by martial law and then by a negro militia.

Three more children were born to the Rion's; Lucy Tenney in 1866, John Weir in 1869, who died in 1872, and Hannah in 1874.

He was elected a member of the State Constitutional Convention in August 1866 and from 1876 to 1880 was the South Carolina member of the Democratic National Executive Committee. In November 1886, just before his death in December, he was elected president of the South Carolina Bar Association.

He was always interested in matters of education. First as an instructor at Mt. Zion Institute, then as a trustee of that institution from 1860 until his death. In 1876, he built and opened a model kindergarten in Winnsboro, under Miss Kate Obear, and supported it until his

death. Upon the reorganization of South Carolina College in 1877, he was elected as a trustee, again serving in that capacity until his death. In addition to the Master of Arts degree he received from South Carolina College in 1853, he was awarded a Doctor of Laws degree from Davidson College in North Carolina in 1883.

He was also prominent in local banking and railroad matters. He began as a director of the Planter Bank of Fairfield from 1857 through 1859 and President in 1860 and 1861. Then in 1873 he became a director of the Central National Bank of Columbia. In 1868, he became a director of the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad, and, after its merger with the Columbia and Augusta Railroad, their successor, the Charlotte, Columbia and Augusta Railroad. Additionally, he served as solicitor of the Wilmington, Columbia and Augusta Railroad.

His name itself for many years was applied to a railroad, the Rockton-Rion Railway. One of his many commercial ventures after the War was the Winnsboro Granite Company. The quarry was actually south of Winnsboro near the small village of Rocktown. The nearest point on the main rail line was called Rockton. Because Col. Rion was instrumental in obtaining a right-of-way from the farmers between Rockton and Rocktown for a spur to service the quarries in the area, and to eliminate potential confusion, Rocktown was renamed Rion in his honor. It still appears on South Carolina maps and has its own postmark, even though both the Railway and the quarry are no longer in operation.

Among his many prominent clients was, not surprisingly, Thomas Green Clemson who had married John C. Calhoun's daughter, Anna Maria. In 1883, Rion prepared Clemson's will which contained the provisions that eventually lead to the establishment of Clemson College on the land around Calhoun's old home at Fort Hill. He was named executor in this will and a subsequent revision made in November 1886. However, he was replaced in a codicil to the latter will after his death a little over a month after that will was executed.

His death brings us full circle in this oral biography. I think one thing can be said for certain, even without his last extraordinary claim, James Henry Rion was a true Renaissance man.

UPDATE

On April 18, 2000, two European scientists announced that they had completed a DNA analysis that proved that the boy that had died alone in a prison cell was, in fact, the son of Marie Antionette. One of the doctors that had been present at the autopsy of the boy had stolen his heart as a memento. The heart passed through various owners until 1975 when it was put into the custody of the Memorial of France at St.-Denis, a private organization that oversees the royal graves. The scientists were able to extract three samples of mitochondrial DNA from the heart and compared them with samples from locks of hair taken from Marie Antionette and two of her sisters and samples taken from two living maternal relatives. In all cases, they said, they found "identical" sequences. This scientific evidence would seem to disprove the claims of James Henry Rion's and all the other claimants that they were the "Lost Dauphin." With familial pride, I can only subscribe to the sentiments expressed by Judge William M. Thomas, who had been

Rion's wartime adjutant, in an April 10, 1887 memorial published in the *Sunday News*, Charleston, SC: "Col. Rion was not a man who would nurse a chimera for a lifetime." He must have been told the story of his ancestry by someone who he believed, and he lived his life as though the story was fact.