

HISTORY AND TECHNOLOGY COMBINE TO SOLVE KNAPSACK MYSTERY

On September 30, 1864, a Union sharpshooter found himself surrounded by a band of determined Confederates on a Virginia battlefield. Outnumbered, the soldier and his brethren bolted for safety, cutting loose their knapsacks in the scramble to live.

A peach-faced Confederate sharpshooter named Oscar Fitzland Chappell picked up one of those sacks. Just 17 years old, Chappell held onto that simple canvas pack for the rest of the war, even through the misery of a New York prisoner-of-war camp.

For more than a century, the rare knapsack has been in the collection of the South Carolina Confederate Relic Room and Museum. Today, it is the center of a mystery that scientists from NASA are trying to solve with space-age technology that may one day help in fighting crime.



**UNION SHARPSHOOTER'S
KNAPSACK**

Learning the identity of the Union soldier would round out what is an amazing story. A great deal is already known about the man who picked up the bag on that battlefield, thanks largely to the research of Dr. David Moore at North Georgia College and State University.



**OSCAR CHAPPELL AT
A UCV REUNION**

Chappell enlisted January 4, 1864, at Alston, South Carolina in Fairfield County. He served as a Private in Co. F of the 12th South Carolina Volunteers and was with Dunlop's Sharpshooters. He picked up the knapsack in question at the battle of Jones Farm, Virginia on September 30, 1864 after a Confederate advance that resulted in confusion among surprised Union troops.

Sharpshooters in both the Union and Confederate armies were skilled marksmen who specialized in attacking enemy positions, warding off attacks, and other skirmishing roles. Many sharpshooters considered themselves to be elite units, often receiving special equipment, uniforms, and training.

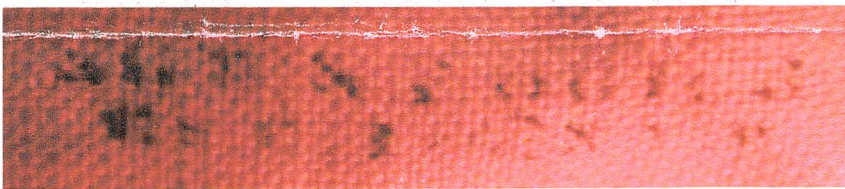
The fur-covered knapsack was patterned after 19th century Prussian design and manufactured by Tiffany & Co. in New York. The knapsack belonging to the SC Confederate Relic Room and Museum is one of only five known to exist today.

Chappell was later taken prisoner on the retreat from Petersburg, Virginia and carried the knapsack through a term in prison at Harts Island, NY. It is likely that the knapsack's straps were missing when he found it. The knapsack has a twine-like cord at the top.

After the Civil War he was active in Confederate reunion groups. Chappell donated the knapsack to the SCCRRM between 1896 and 1904, according to a published collections catalog. He died in 1922 and is buried at Crooked Run Baptist Church in Winnsboro. Descendants of Oscar F. Chappell still live on the original family property.

Arthur Ruitberg hopes that new infrared technology will make legible the faded name of the Union soldier that was written on the knapsack's interior flap but that cannot be read with standard magnifying equipment.

He has both personal and professional reasons for wanting to answer that question.



INFRARED IMAGE OF THE KNAPSACK'S INTERIOR FLAP

Ruitberg is an electrical engineer at the NASA/Goddard Spaceflight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. He also works on a project with the U.S. Department of Justice transferring NASA

technology to forensics work. Part of the work is involved with text recognition and reconstruction. He has taken infrared photographs of the illegible ink on the interior flap. After the photographs are analyzed, he hopes to be able to match the letters with a name on one of the rosters of Union Sharpshooters. He is also an avid Civil War re-enactor and a member of the Berdan Sharpshooters Association.

The knapsack is in great need of conservation and the museum appreciates and donations toward this cause.

The knapsack is a significant piece of material culture for many reasons. Its incredible story brought history and technology together in an effort to learn the identity of its original owner. With the results, we hope to be able to tell a more complete story of its journey with both Union and Confederate soldiers--and it's all the more interesting that both were sharpshooters.