

## "LUM" AND THE "FEDS"

(This true story about the future husband of SARAH ELIZABETH LEITNER was told many times by this Civil War veteran himself. It is recorded here from the memory of his son, Clarence C. Priest and his Yankee grandson-in-law, R. Earl Kipp. Earl and "Lum" Priest were good friends although Earl's Pennsylvania Dad and Granddad were always referred to as "Damn Yankees" by the outspoken Lum. The words were generally accompanied by a disgusting spit!)

Lum Priest seems to have had a carefree life on his father's farm near Palatka, Fla.(Putnam County). Then in 1861 when the unfortunate Civil War was begun and then in 1862-1864 when it was at its height, the Union army was attempting to cut off the sending of food and supplies from Florida to the "Rebel" Troops to the north.

Foraging parties of Federal troops were sent into the central part of the state to confiscate cattle, horses, and hogs and to frighten the old men, women and children who had been left behind when the young men of strength and vigor went to war.

By 1862 Lum's older brothers, Gabriel and John Priest, had already joined the "Boys in Gray". Sixteen year old Chris "Lum" and 13 year old James were at home keeping the farm going as best they could. (Their father, Gabriel Priest, was not old but had been in ill health since serving in the Seminole Indian Wars.). Lum's task was driving the cattle back and forth to grazing land. This was near Crescent City in Putnam Co. One bleak day "The Enemy In Blue" stole some of the cattle and drove them to their camp. When Lum went to search for the cattle, he was captured and traveled with the Union troops for some time. At last he was sent home as an underage boy. When he walked through the door at home his grieving, worried parents welcomed him as though he had returned from the grave; but their joy was short lived.

Some days later Lum was captured again while tending the remaining cattle. He was held in a Union camp on the east side of the St. Johns River near East Palatka, not too far from his parents' home. At this time the Union soldiers were very restless. They were roaming, stealing, and burning in increasing numbers. Their commanding officer had the prisoner, Lum, brought to him, and in words similar to these said, "Your parents are in great danger from my men. I will give you 24 hours in which to move them across the river where some Confederate troops are encamped. I expect you back here tomorrow. Don't forget that you are a prisoner of war."

When Lum arrived home his parents, brother James, and the Negro slaves were in a state of hysteria and very hungry. No bridge was across this two mile stretch of the St. Johns, so Lum, a cousin, George Priest, and young James hitched the mule to the two-wheeled cart, loaded their Dad, Mother and the more feeble Negroes, and drove them to the river. Here the only way they could get across the river was to make "the mule swim across." This feat was probably accomplished the way a Methodist Circuit Rider preacher of the day described his crossing of the Withlatchoochee:

The mule backed the cart over the row boat until the axle rested upon the gunwales. The mule was unhitched and forced to swim the river. The men swam beside the boat and pushed it to the other side. Here the mule was harnessed up and the journey resumed.

All of this was done under cover of darkness, in the dead of night. Quietness was most essential because of the closeness of the enemy.

With this desperate frightening experience the little family reached the other side. Here, the great danger was that the encampment of Southern troops would mistake the Priest refugees for Federal spys and shoot them. So Lum, in his most manly voice, called out, "Hello-0-0, out there! We are friends. We need help!"

Now it so happened that big brother, Sergeant Gabriel W. Priest, was with the Confederates and recognized the voice of brother Lum. He answered immediately and came forward to take charge!

P. S. Lum did not return to the Union prison. Instead, on 1 Aug. 1864 he enlisted at Waldo, Fla. in Co. H. 1st Fla. Reserves. Columbus Priest was discharged at the end of the war in May 1865. I, Fan Priest Kipp, heard Grandpa say that he could not have survived another year for not only was he constantly hungry but the only clothes he had were one cotton shirt and a threadbare pair of cotton pants that he was wearing. He was barefooted. Lum was being sent northward to Virginia when the war ended. He was in Tallahassee, Fla. at the time and was discharged at Madison, Fla.

(The following is from a page in the notebook of Emily Priest Brockman-told her by her "Pop" Clarence C. Priest) Lum was on a detail at Tallahassee at the corral taking care of the horses. He got hungry and had nothing to eat except horse corn. He filled a canteen with gun powder and set fire to it so he could make himself a pan in which to roast corn. It blew a hole in the canteen all right, but it also blew a hole in the top of the building.