

## Confederate Postal History

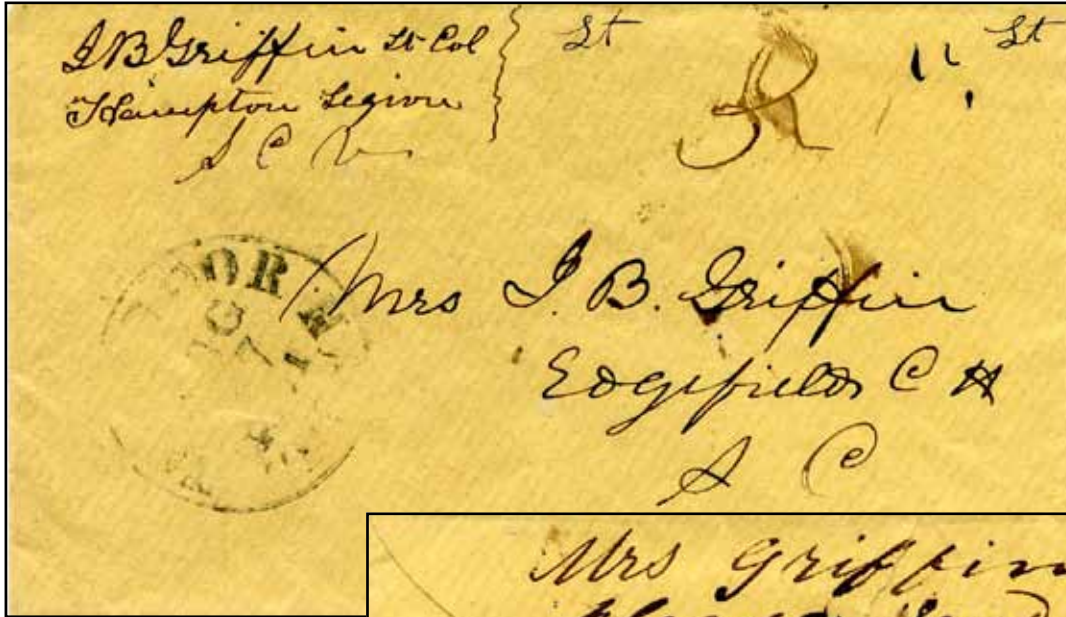


Figure 1: Envelope postmarked Tudor Hall, Virginia, Aug. 17, 1861, from Lt. Col. J.B. Griffin, Hampton Legion SCV to his wife, franked with manuscript [due] 5 with postage to be collected from recipient.

Figure 2: On the back of the Figure 1 envelope is a note from the receiving postmaster to Mrs. Griffin asking her to send him the postage for this letter.



## An Aristocratic Planter Goes to War

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

### An Officer's Postage Due Cover

The receiving postmaster's note on the back of the Figure 1 soldier's cover initially caught my attention but, once I started to research him, the officer who wrote the letter home to his darling wife really captured my imagination.

The envelope is an ordinary soldier's cover from Tudor Hall, Virginia. Serious Confederate postal history students know that Tudor Hall was the post office for soldiers in the field at the Battle of Manassas or the Battle of Bull Run, as it is known in the North.

The cover is addressed to "Mrs. J.B. Griffin, Edgefield C.H., SC" with a simple scrawled manuscript "[due] 5" at the upper right and the endorsement of "J.B. Griffin, Lt. Col., Hampton Legion, SCV" at upper

left. SCV stands for South Carolina Volunteers. As was often the case during this time period, the postage due marking was understood and not necessarily written out. If paid in advance, it would have been appropriately marked as paid.

Basic Confederate postage rates at this time were determined by weight and, initially, by distance. In all but a few cases, letter postage was required by law to be prepaid, although unpaid letters were accepted and marked with postage due by some postmasters throughout the war. Exemptions to the prepayment requirement included soldiers' letters and other mailable matter.

The Act of July 29, 1861 permitted Confederate military personnel to send all types of mail without

prepayment of postage. The postage was collected on delivery from the recipient. Postage rates were the same as if prepaid. All such mail was to be endorsed with the name and unit of the soldier. In the case of officers, they were to also include their title.

On the back of the cover, shown in Figure 2, is a note from the receiving postmaster to the recipient, “Mrs. Griffin you will please send me the postage on this letter. J.S. Adams, P.M., Dorns Mill, S.C.”

This was still early in the war. The date of the postmark is August 17, 1861. Mrs. Griffin may or may not even have been aware that she needed to pay the postage since the act was only dated a little more than two weeks before.

### James Benjamin Griffin (1825-1881) Hampton Legion

Hollywood handsome Jimmie Griffin did not go off to war as an ordinary soldier. The wealthy 35-year old planter of Highland House Plantation took with him two slaves, two trunks, his favorite hunting dog and his favorite horse, as well as other tangible amenities.

He left behind seven children twelve years old and younger, as well as his wife Leila (Eliza Harwood Burt 1829-1922 of Sunnyside Plantation) who was eight and a half months pregnant.

Jimmie Griffin was first married in 1847 to 15-year old Emma Rebecca Miller who died in childbirth with their second son in September 1850. Griffin was remarried to Leila in 1853. His two marriages produced nine children in all, not including the child who died with his first wife.

The 1860 Edgefield District, South Carolina, slave census showed that Griffin owned 61 slaves and 1,500 acres, of which 700 were improved. Only one person in the county younger than Griffin had more slaves.

In 1860, the mean for slave owners was 14 slaves. For the entire 1860 slave census of the Edgefield District, the mean number of slaves was 4.2.

In April 1861, Confederate President Jefferson Davis wanted to raise a “legion of honor.” Wade Hampton was authorized to create this legion and thus Hampton Legion was mustered into Confederate Service on June 19, 1861. It was composed of eight companies of infantry, four troops of cavalry and two batteries of horse artillery. They were the flower of Confederate manhood.

James B. Griffin enlisted as a major in the Field & Staff of South Carolina Hampton Legion Infantry, Unassigned, Army of the Potomac. After the initial enlistment of one year, Hampton Legion separated into different units.

Hampton Legion was prominent at the First Battle of Manassas but Major Griffin was stationed at Camp Ashland, near Ashland, Virginia, on July 21, 1861, thus

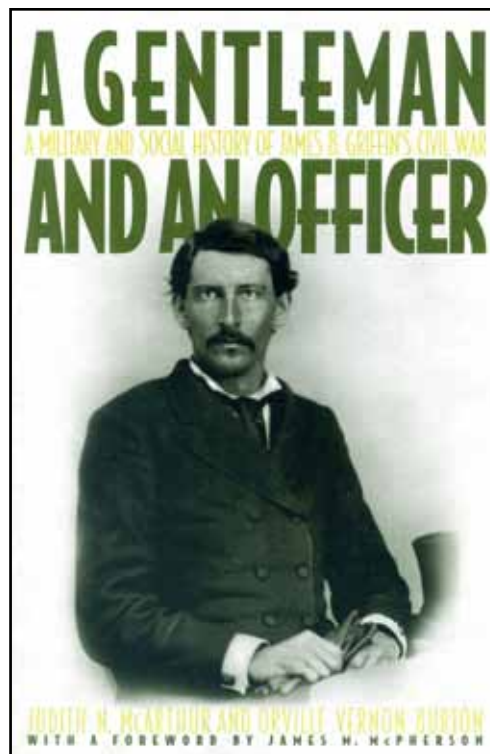


Figure 3: Dust jacket from a book of J.B. Griffin's published wartime letters to his wife.

not present at First Manassas. On the death of Colonel B.J. Johnson, killed in that battle, Maj. Griffin was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel, assigned to command the infantry. Griffin's appointment was confirmed on August 15 and he took rank from July 21. He declined appointment to full colonel.

Various mentions of Lt. Col. Griffin may be found in the *Official Records*. In a report dated May 7-8, 1862 by Col. Wade Hampton, commanding Second Brigade, to Major James H. Hill, Hampton notes, “I take great pleasure in saying that the conduct of officers and men met with my entire approval. Colonel Griffin, in command of the Legion, handled them admirably.”

While researching Griffin, I took a couple of wrong turns before finding the ultimate source—Griffin himself. My search ratcheted to the top when I found the wonderful book with the handsome dust jacket shown in Figure 3: *A Gentleman and an Officer: A Military and Social History of James B. Griffin's Civil War*.

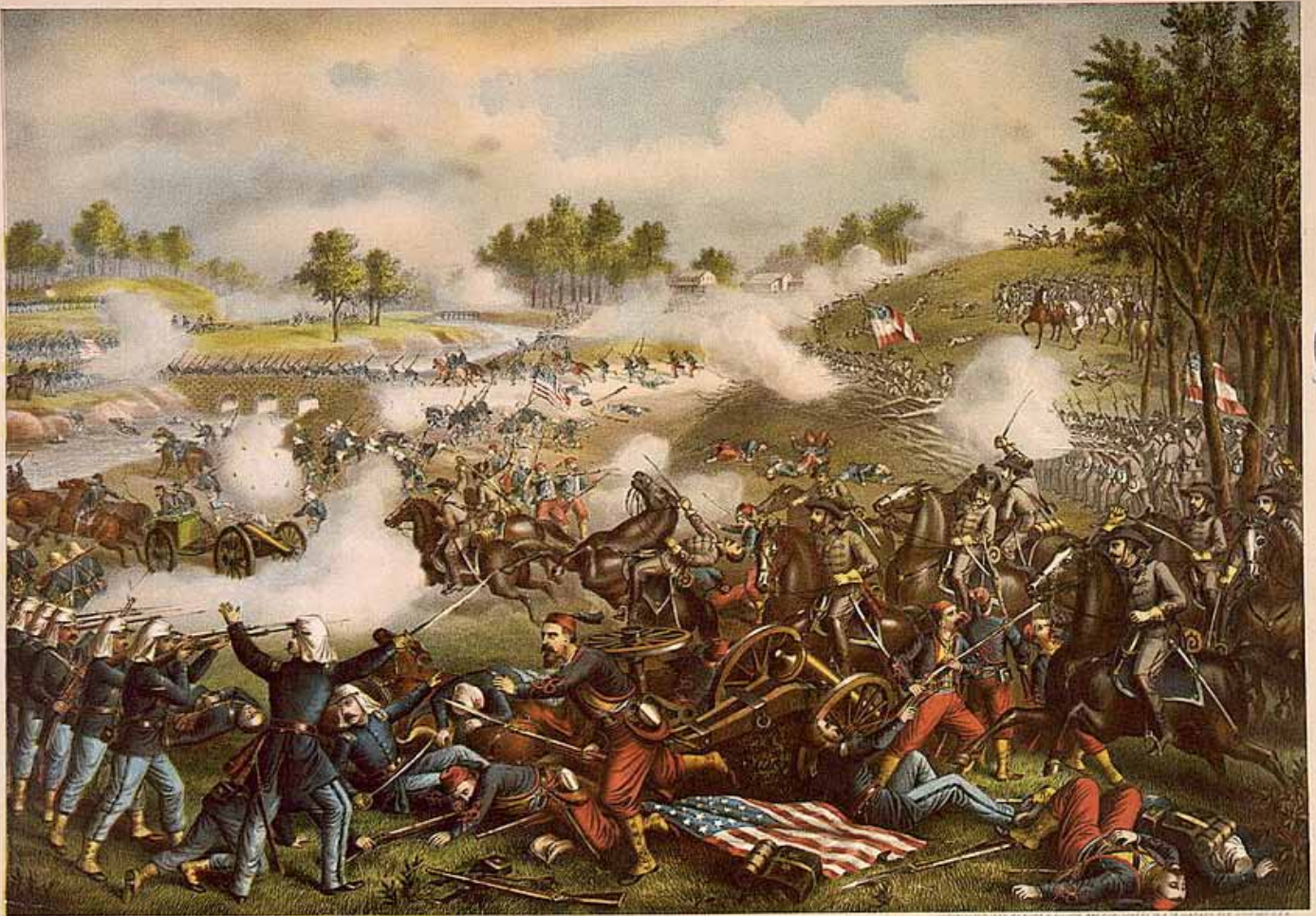
Judith N. McArthur and Orville Vernon Burton collected 80 of J. B. Griffin's letters written during the

#### Opposite—

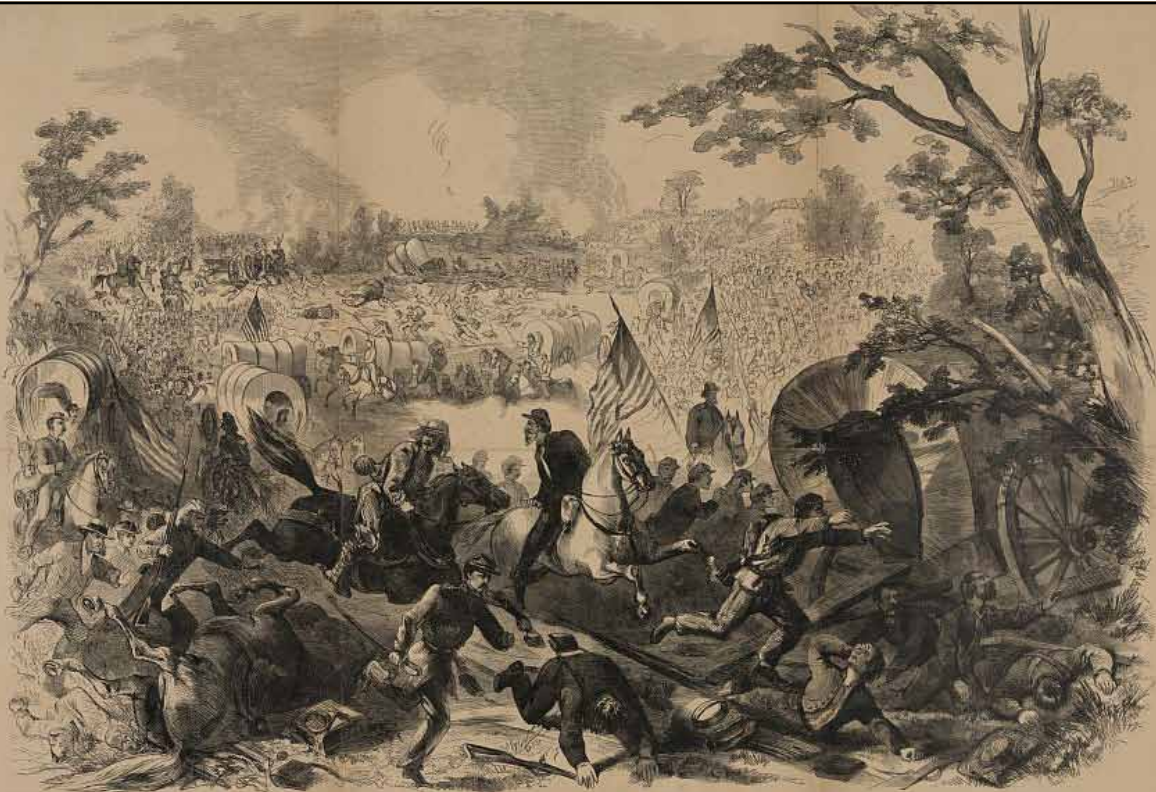
Figure 4 (Top): The First Battle of Bull Run, chromolithograph by Kurz & Allison Art Publishers of Chicago.

Figure 5 (Bottom): An 1884 wood engraving, published by the J. Howard Brown Co., of the First Battle of Bull Run, Virginia, Sunday afternoon, July 21, 1861. (Courtesy Library of Congress)





BATTLE OF BULL RUN.



THE FIRST BATTLE OF BULL RUN, VA. SUNDAY AFTERNOON JULY 21, 1861.





**Figure 6: Gravestone of J. B. Griffin. Oakwood Cemetery, Fort Worth, Texas.**

war to his wife, Leila Burt Griffin, and interspersed them with appropriate, well documented historical commentary and highly detailed footnotes. In these letters, Griffin describes secret troop movements in various military actions such as the Hampton Legion's role in the Peninsula Campaign. He relates the march from Manassas to Fredericksburg, the siege of Yorktown, the retreat to Richmond, and the fighting at Seven Pines, where Griffin commanded the legion after Hampton was wounded. After the unit's dissolution in 1862, Griffin joined the South Carolina Home Guard, where he remained until the end of the war.

Before buying the book, I noted in online research that Griffin was struck by lightning and subsequently dropped at reorganization. I found the specifics of that incident related in Griffin's own words in Letter 15.

It was dated September 17, 1861, a month after the subject cover of this article; it described in detail how he was almost killed when he and two others were trying to secure a ridge pole (long pole that runs the length of a tent) when a bolt of lightning struck the pole. It killed "Dr. Buist's boy" (slave) instantly and dropped Dr. Buist and Griffin in a heap. Griffin described his left side from shoulder to foot as completely paralyzed and described how doctors worked on him for an hour and a half to restore circulation.

I commend *A Gentleman and an Officer* as a great read to anyone interested in riveting Civil War history. It is readily available online. The actual Griffin letters are a privately held family collection in the possession of Griffin's great-grandson. Photocopies, as well as newspaper clippings and genealogical research, are at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

As you might correctly surmise by the current location of the Griffin correspondence, J.B. Griffin

made his way to Texas in 1866, having lost nearly everything of monetary value during the war. Along with many other Southerners, Griffin and his family had "Gone to Texas" or "GTT"—a note often found posted on abandoned properties in the South after the war. Griffin is buried in Oakwood Cemetery, Fort Worth, Tarrant County, Texas. His gravestone is shown in Figure 6.

### Conclusion

My initial research on the subject cover yielded little save that Griffin enlisted as a major, was promoted to lieutenant colonel and was in Field & Staff Hampton Legion Infantry. Sometimes generating so little information is a good thing; it only causes me to dig deeper. I also found that this cover was an old friend. It was Lot 560 in Auction 29 of John W. Kaufmann, Inc., which was the official auction of the Confederate Stamp Alliance held in Atlanta, Georgia, on October 16, 1976. It was a captivating reacquaintance.

The J.B. Griffin tale is a lamentably typical one of a wealthy Southern family who lost virtually everything in the war. There are no photos of Highland House Plantation, but when it burned in 1864, the *Edgefield Advertiser* described it as "the largest and most elegant [mansion] in our vicinity." Fortunately, Griffin's business experience stood him in good stead when he moved forward to pick up the pieces of his life in his newly adopted state of Texas.

For membership or other information about the Confederate Stamp Alliance, e-mail Trish Kaufmann at: [trishkauf@comcast.net](mailto:trishkauf@comcast.net).

### Endnotes

- 1 Patricia A. Kaufmann, Francis J. Crown Jr., Jerry S. Palazolo, *Confederate States of America Catalog and Handbook of Stamps and Postal History*, Confederate Stamp Alliance, 2012, pp. 31-35.
- 2 Find A Grave Memorial #54957800, Accessed July 2014. Emma Rebecca Miller Griffin. <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=54957800>
- 3 Judith N. McArthur and Orville Vernon Burton, *A Gentleman and an Officer: A Military and Social History of James B. Griffin's Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 327.
- 4 GenForum, James II Griffin, 1782-1855, Edgefield SC; s/o ARW Pvt SC Militia James & Frances. <http://genforum.genealogy.com/griffin/messages/9222.html> Accessed July 2014.
- 5 *Edgefield County, South Carolina Largest Slaveholders from 1860 Slave Census Schedules and Surname Matches for African Americans on 1870 Census*, transcribed by Tom Blake, October 2001, p. 461B. <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ajac/scedgefield.htm> Accessed July 2014.
- 6 Clayton E. Jewett, editor, *The Battlefield and Beyond: Essays on the American Civil War: Conflicting Words: New Dimensions of the American Civil War*, LSU Press, May 2012.
- 7 Ulysses Robert Brooks, *Butler and His Cavalry in the War of Secession, 1861-1865*. Columbia, South Carolina: State Co., 1909, p. 48.
- 8 McArthur, Burton, pp. 119-123.
- 9 McArthur, Burton, pp. 305-306.
- 10 McArthur, Burton, p. 24.

(Patricia (Trish) Kaufmann is a fulltime dealer specializing solely in Confederate States stamps and postal history.)