

Private Lewis Leon
Co. C (Charlotte Grays) – 1st N. C. Infantry and later Co. B – 53rd N. C. Infantry

Leon was born in Sheffield, England, in 1842. His parents emigrated to North Carolina in 1848 when Lewis was 6 years old.

He enlisted originally in Company C of the 1st North Carolina for 6 months. Re-enlisted on April 14, 1862, in Mecklenburg County. He was 20 years of age. Later in the war the 1st would be consolidated in to the 53rd North Carolina Infantry.

On February 4, 1863, Leon wrote from Goldsboro, N. C., *"We took snow, put it in our kettles, and made coffee, I mean Confederate coffee – parched corn - that is our coffee. Ate our corn bread and bacon . . . and slept as good if not better than Abe Lincoln."*

At Gettysburg on July 4, 1863 he noted, *" . . .we are burying the dead. They have been lying on the field in the sun since the first day's fight; it being dusty and hot, the dead smell terrible."*

Near Orange Court House on August 12th the 1st North Carolina was caught in a terrible summer storm. Leon wrote, *"We had a severe storm to-day which killed two men and hurt several in our brigade. It tore up trees and played smash in general."*

Leon was captured at the battle of The Wilderness on May 5, 1864. On May 17th he is shown at Point Lookout Prison in Maryland. He was transferred to Elmira Prison in New York on July 25, 1864 and arrived 3 days later. Prison records describe Leon as 5' 4 12", dark eyes and black hair. He was released from Elmira on April 12, 1865 after taking the Oath of Allegiance.

He took transportation to New York City and there passage was provided to North Carolina. He then returned to his parent's home in Mecklenburg County and a desolated South. He closed his diary by saying, *"I do not regret, nor am I sorry for one day that I have given – my only regret is that we have lost that for which we fought."*

His final thought, *"to the younger generation of Southern born [this diary] will show how we endured and suffered but still fought on for the cause we know was right."*

Leon's diary of his experiences was published in 1913 in Charlotte, North Carolina, under the title of *Diary of a Tar Heel Confederate Soldier* to preserve the memories of a common soldier.

(Compiled Service Records – Confederate, Brewer Library, United Daughters of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia, Micro Copy 270, Roll 504: *Mama, I Am Yet Still Alive*, Jeff Toalson, Bloomington, 2012, by date.)