

FACE FROM THE PAST

By Chris Sanders

Have you noticed that ancestors have a way of popping up when you least expect it? They're lurking in the background somewhere in the mist waiting for the right moment to emerge and say, "Hi, here I am!"

This "moment" happened to me recently when I was chatting on the phone with my sister-in-law in Virginia. I'm not even sure how the conversation came about, but when it did I was completely shocked! Actually, the ancestor—David William Sanders—belonged to my husband, but since I was the family historian, my ears would perk up every time David's name was mentioned.

Yes, David, who was killed on November 6, 1863, at the Civil War Battle of Droop Mountain, West Virginia, the largest Civil War battle of West Virginia, was spoken of frequently during all the family gatherings. Even though his death occurred almost 158 years ago, at the time of the conversation with my sister-in-law, it was as if David was still part of the family circle and known by everyone. Seemingly he had lived and breathed yesterday.

Being keenly interested in the Civil War, I was even more interested in this David W. Sanders. I started scratching around and found that David was born on August 10, 1833, in Preston County, West Virginia (Virginia at the time). It's important to remember that West Virginia was created when the western portion of Virginia seceded from the Confederate state and named itself West Virginia, the Mountain State, (why do I keep thinking of John Denver!) forsaking the rebellion of the Confederacy for membership in the Union. West Virginia became the 35th state admitted to the Union on June 20, 1863, just weeks after the Battle of Gettysburg. In the first inauguration speech of a West Virginia Governor, Arthur Boreman stated "West Virginia should long since have had a separate State existence. The East and West have always been two peoples."

But it wasn't all that easy to just create a new state. The hearts and minds of the people were still divided—north and south. David chose north, but I found out later, his wife, Mary Shafer Sanders, was remarried a year after David's death to a "Southern sympathizer"! Furthermore, her father Henry had enlisted on the southern side in 1861 and deserted the next day! (Did he have a change of heart?!)

David gave his life for the North, being killed at the Battle of Droop Mountain on November 6, 1863, after only six months of service. Initially he was buried near the Josiah Beard house which was being used as a field hospital. Then in 1867 all West Virginian soldiers killed in the Civil War were exhumed and moved to the Grafton National Cemetery, Grafton, West Virginia. David left a wife and three children, John, Alexander and Mandana, Alexander being my husband's ancestor.

Over the years, as I said, David would always "be there," amidst the family during our many visits to Elkins, West Virginia. Aunts and uncles showed my husband where David's son, Alexander was buried, and Alexander was also lovingly remembered in their conversations. Isn't it funny how our ancestors never die—they are always part of us and our legacy. Luckily, we had inherited

information. Others were not so fortunate. Many Civil War soldiers fell and died without ever being identified.

So, the years went by and David's story was tucked away in my "Sanders" notebook, but still never far from my mind. We even took a trip to Grafton, West Virginia to see if we could find David's grave which was listed on the large Battle of Droop Mountain monument. Unfortunately, however, we were unable to do that as the cemetery was unbelievably huge and there was no help available. This was highly disappointing; however, it was thrilling just to say we had been to the site and we knew David was "out there," hopefully perceiving our efforts. I could see at that moment how very much my husband—who was normally not very vocal—was interested in his roots. But there was always that question—curiosity—what was David like, **WHAT DID HE LOOK LIKE?** Little did I know at that time that about 10 years later we would find out! Which is why I'm writing this story!

So, getting back to my conversation with my sister-in-law, she said, "you know Diane (one of the Elkins, West Virginia cousins) has a picture of David." **WHAT? WAIT A MINUTE.** There's a **PICTURE** of David?! My sister-in-law began to tell me the story.

Diane, who knew where David's homestead was, saw that it was for sale. She went to look at the property, was shown the living room and to her startled eyes, a huge picture of a Civil War soldier was displayed on the wall! She said, 'Is that...?' **YES!** There "in living color" so to speak was a portrait of her (and my husband's) great-great-great grandfather, David William Sanders, resplendent in his Union uniform. She was stunned and asked the owners "how much will you take for that picture?" They answered that "no amount of money in the world could buy that picture, but we will make you a copy." And they did!



I was floored when I heard this news—and I might add, terribly excited! My sister-in-law kindly contacted her cousin—who come to find out was in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina taking a siesta from the bitter West Virginia winters. But Diane said she would text a picture of David—**TO ME**—when she got back. Oh boy, waiting for that picture was agonizing, but finally it came!

There I was, staring at the picture of David William Sanders—who looked just like my husband, beard and all! David with those piercing eyes, and his Sharp carbine slung on his shoulder looked very serious. He was ready for action! More tidbits of information gleaned from his Civil War Service Record, Union Army, David was 5'9", fair-complected, had gray eyes, auburn hair and occupation of a farmer.

David's picture is now proudly displayed on the wall of our living room beside that of all our other family members, and is truly part of the family now. Mystery solved! David did you have something to do with this? Lol!

The moral of the story, when searching for your ancestor, is to never-give-up! You might have a David somewhere waiting for their picture to be discovered!

