

(See preceding page.)

Hilt close-up of Major Pierson's Model 1860 Cavalry Officers' Saber, showing the exceptional degree of artistic decoration on the entire hilt. (Ralph E. Arnold Collection)

A Sword from the Atlanta Campaign

by Ralph E. Arnold

MOST COLLECTORS, at one time or another, have wished that a particularly interesting arm could talk. The sword illustrated here can, at least to the extent of telling where it has been.

Its owner, Stephen Pierson of Morristown, New Jersey, left not only his name on the blade but also a list of many of the battles in which he carried it during the Georgia Campaign — from Chattanooga to Atlanta, on to Savannah, and the pursuit of Johnston up through the Carolinas to his surrender near Raleigh, North Carolina, on April 26, 1865, seventeen days after Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox.

Pierson left an even more detailed record than his sword, however, in a paper titled "From Chattanooga to Atlanta in 1864 — A Personal Reminiscence" published several years after his death in the July 1931 issue of Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society. Based on notes made in the field, supplemented by a thorough study of other accounts and several visits back to many of the scenes described, it is a stirring and detailed account.

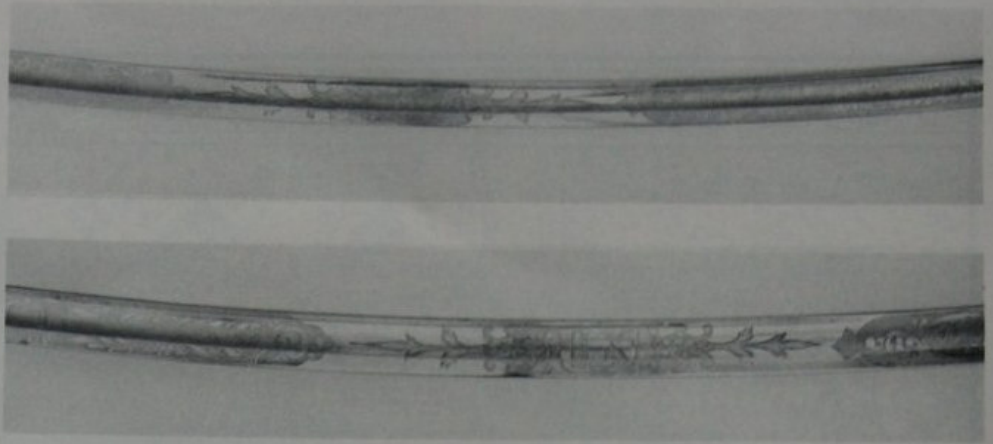
A Jerseyman by ancestry and birth, Pierson represented the eighth generation of his family in America. He was born at Orange on November 22, 1830, the son of Dr. William Pierson, a well known physician.

Stephen Pierson graduated from the Medical Department of New York University in 1852, joined in practice with his father, and after the war was better known as a physician and surgeon than by his military title. He was associated with numerous hospitals as

surgeon and consulting surgeon, and held several offices, including president, of the New Jersey State Medical Society.

During his Civil War service, Pierson was First Lieutenant and Adjutant, 33rd New Jersey Volunteers, Second Brigade, Second Division, Twentieth Army Corps; Brevet Captain; and Major, U.S. Volunteers. The sword which he carried throughout the Georgia Campaign is a Model 1860 Cavalry Officer's Saber, basically like P-85 in Peterson's *American Sword*, but considerably more decorative than the one illustrated and described.

The additional ornamentation appears on the hilt and counter-guard. The branches of the guard are profusely decorated with leaves and berries for their full length on the outside and for the lower third on the inside where they join the guard. The regulation blade decoration, with the American Eagle and ribbon reading "E PLURIBUS UNUM" in the center of the obverse side and floral panel containing "U.S." on the reverse, was supplemented after the war with very high quality etching. On the reverse, two panels read "STEPHEN PIERSON First Lieut and Adjt" and "33rd NEW JERSEY VOLS." On the obverse was added to even more artistically embellished panels reading "ROCKY FACE, RESACA, NEW HOPE CHURCH, PINE KNOB, PEACH TREE CREEK", and "ATLANTA, CAMPAIGNS OF GEORGIA and the CAROLINAS, JOHNSTON'S SURRENDER".



(Top) Close-up of part of blade obverse showing original center panel with eagle, and added etched panels commemorating the Atlanta Campaign, campaigns of Georgia and Johnston's Surrender.

(Lower) Close-up of part of blade reverse showing original center panel with "U.S.", and added etched panels reading, "STEPHEN PIERSON, First Lieut. and Adjut." and "33rd NEW JERSEY VOLS."

(Left) Major Pierson's Saber showing blade obverse and the two etched panels added after the Civil War. Center panel with eagle was original. Wear on scabbard drag as well as carrying rings clearly indicate a great amount of use.

Like many Civil War officers, Pierson wanted his sword to commemorate the historic campaigns and the hardships he had been through, an experience which, as his written account shows, was as vividly etched on his mind as on his sword blade. A sword of this type is quite a different thing from a presentation sword, a trophy given after the fact. Pierson's sword "was there."

The closing paragraph of his reminiscence best conveys the impact of the campaign upon him.

As we neared the city I turned in my saddle to look back at the Regiment. A fine and hardy lot of men they were; not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon any of them; lean visaged, bright-eyed, quick of step, power and vigor; joy and triumph written all over them and their every movement. Schooled, trained, disciplined, hammered in the fiery College of War, they were soldiers -- soldiers to be proud of. Then my thoughts went back a bit. How few of them there are! Of the more than five hundred who marched out of Chattanooga, but few over a hundred were left to follow the flag into Atlanta. The others were lying at Rocky Face, at Resaca, at Dallas, at Pine Knob, at Peachtree Creek, or were languishing in hospitals, or Rebel prisons. Only a hundred of us? Oh no! No!! The five hundred, I thought, are all here. To them, equally with us who march, is the honor and the glory. For, by their sacrifice of life or limb, of health or vigor, on many a field, in many a trench, giving their best, their very best, they made this triumph possible. Yes! into Atlanta we were marching, full five hundred strong.

(see overleaf)

