



Robert Wilson's rendering of Richard Kirkland's heroism

Painting to hang in Capitol

Recognizing a war hero

Heroes usually get lots of attention, especially back home, where the home folks like to dedicate buildings to them, make speeches about them and throw celebrations in their honor.

Richard Kirkland missed out on that. Few people seem to know anything about him in his home state of South Carolina.

But a Greenville history buff, a Woodruff artist and a Greenville bank have collaborated to assure that Kirkland gets proper recognition in South Carolina for actions that in his day were called "Christ-like."

Tuesday a portrait of Kirkland will be unveiled at the state Capitol in Columbia, where it will



By Diane Sechrest
Piedmont
people writer

hang permanently. State Sen. Jeff Richardson of Greenville, who was instrumental in obtaining permission for the painting to hang in the Capitol, will preside at a 10:30 a.m. ceremony honoring Kirkland's memory. Sen. Rembert Dennis, president pro tempore of the state Senate, and Speaker of the House Raymon Schwartz will unveil the painting.

Among guests at the cere-

mony will be Bill Hughes, a Greenville insurance salesman and Furman University history graduate who had not heard of Kirkland until he visited a Civil War battle site in Fredericksburg, Va., 13 years ago and saw a bronze statue erected in memory of "Richard Roland Kirkland of South Carolina."

The plaque on the statue gave little information, but through the years Hughes gathered more details about the Camden farmer's son who was a sergeant in the 2nd South Carolina Volunteers during the Civil War. Hughes was deeply affected by Kirkland's story.

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Hero

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In 1862, 19-year-old Kirkland was fighting with Gen. Joseph Kershaw's brigade in Fredericksburg, Va. The Confederates were dug in behind a stone wall that bordered a road. From their secure position, they could fire at Union troops across an open field. The Union general, Ambrose Burnside, kept sending waves of soldiers across the field and by day's end, 9,000 dead or wounded Union soldiers lay in the field.

Through that day and the next, the Confederates stayed behind the wall and listened to the wounded soldiers' cries for water. By late afternoon, Kirkland could bear it no longer. He asked Kershaw for permission to go over the wall and give water to the soldiers.

"Kershaw told him that he would probably be shot the minute he stuck his head above that wall, but he wanted to go anyway," Hughes says.

According to one account, the Union soldiers fired at Kirkland briefly, but the gunfire turned to cheers when they realized Kirkland's intentions. For 90 minutes, he carried water to the soldiers. Later Kershaw called Kirkland's performance "Christ-like."

During fighting at Gettysburg, Kirkland received a field promo-

tion to lieutenant. He was mortally wounded less than three months later when Confederate troops were retreating briefly during a battle at Chickamauga, Ga., and Kirkland turned for a final shot at the enemy.

There are memorials to Kirkland in Fredericksburg and in the Prince of Peace Memorial Church at Gettysburg. He is buried, along with two of his commanders, Kershaw and Gen. John D. Kennedy, in Quaker Cemetery in Camden.

Months ago Hughes called artist Robert Wilson of Woodruff, whose paintings of two Revolutionary War battles hang in the Capitol rotunda in Columbia, and told him the story about Kirkland. He suggested that Kirkland's deed at Fredericksburg might be a good subject for a painting.

Within a few weeks, Wilson had completed a 5-by-6-foot oil painting of Kirkland giving water to the wounded soldiers.

Wilson, a retired Air Force pilot who has been a full-time painter for 20 years, said the Kirkland story was so dramatic that he felt he had to paint it, even though there was no buyer.

Hughes was excited about the work and wanted it placed somewhere where South Carolinians

would see it and remember Kirkland. He approached a Greenville bank, American Federal, about purchasing the painting for the state.

American Federal decided that buying the painting for the state would be an ideal way to honor its former chairman of the board, Marion M. Hewell, who is an avid

student of Southern history.

Hughes is thrilled that Kirkland finally will get the attention a hero deserves. He hopes that others will be touched as he was by "the humaneness of the man in the middle of all the brutality."

"The 19-year-old farm boy's humanity," he says, "broke through the hard shell of the soldier."