

0. THE HOME GUARD - Story Preface

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Members of the "Home Guard," in Confederate States, were responsible for helping to keep the peace. They were also responsible for arresting African-Americans and others who did not have proper passes. This image, from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, has the following caption: "The Plantation Police, or Home Guard, Examining Negro Passes on the Levee Road, Below New Orleans, LA." Online via the Library of Congress. Click on the image for a better view.

Appointed by states to keep order - as demonstrated by this ordinance from the Official Civil War Record for the State of Arkansas - and to bring people in who were suspected of bad behavior, the Home Guard was supposed to help keep the peace. In some instances, however, the Home Guard's methods made it difficult to tell who was actually the criminal.

By 1864, as reflected in Confederate Correspondence from the *Official Record of the Civil War* (Series 1, Volume 32, Part 3, Page 741), Confederate Headquarters for the Western District of North Carolina depended on the Home Guard to return deserters to their proper command:

Many deserters and stragglers who, as soon as our armies begin to move, will seek to find shelter in these mountains could be promptly returned to their commands in the field...

Inman was such a deserter. He was precisely the type of person the Home Guard sought.

When deserters were unable to find existing shelter, they dug earthen caves. The Library of Congress contains an interesting description of such cave dwellers. (See "The Cave-Dwellers of the Confederacy" published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Volume 68, Issue 408, October 1891 - especially page 516):

Then it was that the deserters, as we called all who shirked military duty, whether they had ever actually been in the army or not, had recourse to a mode of hiding which they had learned from runaway slaves. The fugitive in this region having neither the swamps of the east nor the mountains of the west for refuge, like all hard-run creatures naturally took to earth. He either enlarged and concealed some natural cavity, or dug a cave in which he hid by day, to sally out under cover of darkness in quest of poultry, pigs, sheep, fruit, roasting-ears, watermelons, and other good things in season.

How did those on-the-run ward off pursuers?

If he feared pursuit by dogs, he rubbed the soles of his feet with onions or odorous herbs in order to confuse the scent.

How would deserters pick the right spot for a cave?

Banding together in squads of two or three, some unfrequented place would be chosen, generally on a hillside to avoid moisture, and as near a stream as practicable, for the easiest and safest way of disposing of the earth thrown up in digging the pit was to dump it in running water.

How did cave-dwellers create their hiding place?

The site being carefully selected and reconnoitered from every possible way of approach, a watch was set, and work was begun and pressed with the utmost dispatch. First the leaves or pine-needles were raked back and a space lined off, usually six by eight feet, but often considerably larger. Then the ubiquitous bedquilt was spread to catch every particle of the tell-tale clay, and grubbing hoes, spades, and all available implements were put in rapid motion.

When the cave was finished, how did its dwellers conceal it from the Home Guard?

...as the direction from which the cave was approached had to be constantly changed lest the faintest vestige of a path should betray the spot, the labor of transporting eight or ten cubic yards of earth in this primitive fashion was no light undertaking.

During cold weather, how did the cave dwellers keep warm?

The proper depth, commonly about six feet, being attained, a fireplace was cut in the earthen sides of the cave and connected with a flue cut through the adjacent earth...What gave the cave-dweller most concern was the disposal of the smoke from his chimney. Even under the best of circumstances, in the fairest, warmest weather, and in the driest soil, a cave was a dismal abode.

The whole existence of a deserter was a "dismal" affair.

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THE HOME GUARD

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