

Catahoula Remembered

with JEB and Leroy

207th anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans

By John Ed Bartmess

The Battle of New Orleans was fought on January 8, 1815, and was the last battle between the United States and Great Britain in the War of 1812. The war is sometimes referred to as the "Second War of Independence" because many historians believe if England had won this battle, they would have continued fighting to regain America as a colony. This battle was commanded by Major General Andrew Jackson, "Old Hickory" for the United States and General Edward Pakenham of the United Kingdom.

Old Hickory had only arrived in New Orleans on the first day of December and began assembling an army which was made up of Kentucky and Tennessee businessmen, Freemen of Color, Choctaw Indians, Jean Lafitte and his Privateers, sailors, marines, United States troops and two young brothers from Catahoula parish named Rezin and Jim Bowie.

The British had eight thousand troops and the United States had about 5700. The Battle of New Orleans lasted one day. The estimated casualties were sixty-two for the U.S. and 2034 for the British.

Now the song, "The Battle of New Orleans" was written by Jimmy Driftwood and sung by Johnny Horton, Johnny Cash, and many others. Johnny Horton's version went to number one in 1959. Horton's version was on the jukebox at the Fort Grill Café in Harrisonburg, Edwards Café, and Catahoula Courts in Jonesville. Johnny Horton also had a number one hit with "North to Alaska."

Jimmy Driftwood was a schoolteacher and principal in Arkansas who wrote over six thousand songs. The two most famous were "The Battle of New Orleans" and "Tennessee Stud."

In December of 1997 Shirley and I went to check out Mountain View, Arkansas. It was and is a beautiful town. We went to the courthouse square where several musicians were all around the courthouse playing their music. Some were good, some were fair and some not so good, but they were all having a blast and so were the people listening. As we were going back to our motel, we passed the Jimmy Driftwood Music Barn. They were closing for the night so we decided to stay in Mountain View one more day and night so we could see the show. It was a very good decision. The next day we went sight-seeing. We saw a spring coming out of a mountain called Blanchard Springs. It was beautiful and peaceful. We have taken our family there several times.

That night when we went to The Jimmy Driftwood Music Barn most of the music was very much like "bluegrass" country. Mr. and Mrs. Driftwood were there but not singing very much. Mr. Driftwood seemed to be tired and or sick. However, when the M.C. asked us where we were from and we said Louisiana, Mr. Driftwood really perked up and wanted to talk to us. He told us that when Jimmy Davis was governor of Louisiana from 1944 to 1948, Governor Davis had asked him to come to Louisiana and be a music teacher. Mr. Driftwood had declined but when Governor Davis was elected again in 1960, he accepted and moved to Louisiana.

How did a music teacher's history lesson become a hit song? Mr. Driftwood had written, "Battle of New Orleans" in 1936 to teach the difference between the War of 1812 and the American Revolution War. This probably had much to do with Governor Davis asking Mr. Driftwood to come to Louisiana and be a

visiting teacher.

During a break in the show, Mr. Jimmy announced that he was going to sing "The Battle of New Orleans" for his guest from Enterprise, Louisiana. Mr. Jimmy stood behind the podium and had to hold on with both hands. Mrs. Cleda Driftwood had to stand behind Mr. Jimmy and tell him the words. The audience was very respectful and gave him a good round of applause. It was obvious after the show he and Mrs. Cleda insisted that we go with them to their living quarters in the back. We had a very good visit while Mr. Jimmy told us about those four years in Louisiana. You could tell that he really loved Governor Jimmie Davis. It was after Mr. Driftwood's four years in Louisiana that the Driftwood Barn was built in Mountain View, Arkansas.

Mr. Jimmy Driftwood passed away in 1998. During his professional life, Mr. James Corbitt was known as Jimmy Driftwood. He wrote over six thousand folk songs, of which more than three hundred were recorded by various artists. "The Battle of New Orleans" was his biggest hit.

Jimmy and Cleda Driftwood had four children but none of them reached the age of thirty. One child had died at birth, one died from appendicitis. The worst blow was when Mrs. Cleda came home from her teaching job in Mountain View and found their two sons shot in their house.

P.S. Mr. Jimmy Driftwood's song caused me to miss the question, "When was the Battle of New Orleans fought?" I put January 8, 1814. Professor Ferguson explained that they took a little trip in 1814 to get to New Orleans. But the battle was fought on January 8, 1815.

Shot myself story

By Leroy McMillin

Shot Myself Story

Not one to be satisfied by almost dying of rabies from a rabid dog bite, or from cutting my arm almost completely off at the shoulder while roller-skating, or swearing an oath to die for my country when I joined the Army, or even when the dirt walls of a 12' deep construction trench caved in on me while laying 8" sewer pipe, I went and shot myself.

Yes, it was the spring of '53 and much of the lowlands in Catahoula Parish were flooded. Sandy Lake Ridge was still high and dry but the roads to it were underwater. A boat was the only way to get in and out.

Like in years past, I had been living with my grandparents there on the ridge during the summer and understood the annual flooding well. It meant bringing our cattle in from the open range and stacking firewood higher up so it wouldn't float off if the water did reach it.

But this time my grandfather saw a fresh dug armadillo hole in the field north of the barn and confidently informed me that the water will stop rising before it reaches that hole. And sure enough, it did stop rising and things settled down a bit.

Meanwhile, it was Saturday and we had to go to town for some supplies at my dad's store in Harrisonburg. The boat we were using was one of the larger one's that my grandfather had made from cypress planks over eighteen inches wide. He had cut the tree himself with a crosscut saw and had taken the log to a sawmill near Jonesville to get those wide boards cut the way he wanted for his rental boats on Sandy Lake. I think he made eight boats in all from that one cypress tree. It was pretty big.

Grandpa put the motor on the back of the

boat and filled the tank. I loaded my rifle and placed it in the boat. I then loaded some stuff we were taking to town, and we were on our way.

It was maybe three or four miles over to the Manifest highway, and from there we would just have to hitch our way into town to my dad's store in Harrisonburg. Nobody had telephones out in the country so no one knew we were coming. It wasn't long and we caught a ride. Everybody knew everybody around there.

My dad would take us back to the boat but not until later in the afternoon. So grandpa and I went to the picture show where "The Greatest Show on Earth" was playing. I got in for fourteen cents but it cost him a quarter. We both liked the show and talked about it on the boat ride back that evening.

When I got out of the boat I tried carrying the motor, the gas can, a sack of flour and my Marlin bolt action 22 rifle. Why make two trips when I could do it all in one trip?

It was muddy and I stumbled a little going up the bank. My rifle fell to the ground as I slipped in the mud. I heard a 'POW' followed by some ringing in my ear. All of a sudden people came running over to me like something had happened. I couldn't hear them because of the ringing, but evidently, they thought I had been shot.

They looked me over and showed me some holes in my shirt up by my shoulder where a little trickle of blood was coming out.

MY GOD! I had shot myself! I HAD SHOT MYSELF!!! I was gonna die!!! I was only twelve years old!

Then I started wondering what dying was like. If I was dying, it sure didn't feel that much

different than living to me.

But then I wondered if I had shot a hole in my new cowboy hat too. Nope! Just me. That was a relief.

By then someone was pouring some rubbing alcohol on my shoulder. It stung a little, but not much.

Then someone asked how long it had been since I had a 'lock-jaw' shot. Heck, I didn't know. So back in the boat we went trying to reach the highway before dark. We made it and caught another ride, this time directly to the hospital there in Harrisonburg.

Someone went and got my dad while I got my tetanus shot. I thought it was funny that I was getting a shot for having been shot. No longer thinking I was going to die, I started seeing the humor in the whole event. My friends would never let me forget it. But they forgot all about it by the end of summer.

Anyway, Grandpa and I spent the night at my parent's house. Not much was said about me being shot but Mama hugged me a lot. I kinda thought I wouldn't have my gun much longer. But even that wasn't taken away. I suppose it was just a lesson learned the hard way, and besides, who would be stupid enough to shoot themselves twice? I learned a lot of life's lessons that way. Still do.

The next morning we were back in the boat headed to the Ridge. I was drinking a Nehi Orange drink and watching snakes swim lazily along. Every once in a while I would shoot at one but apparently I'm better at hitting targets my size.

Seven years later the Army taught me how to be a better shot. And as far as I know, no one shot at me ever again.

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