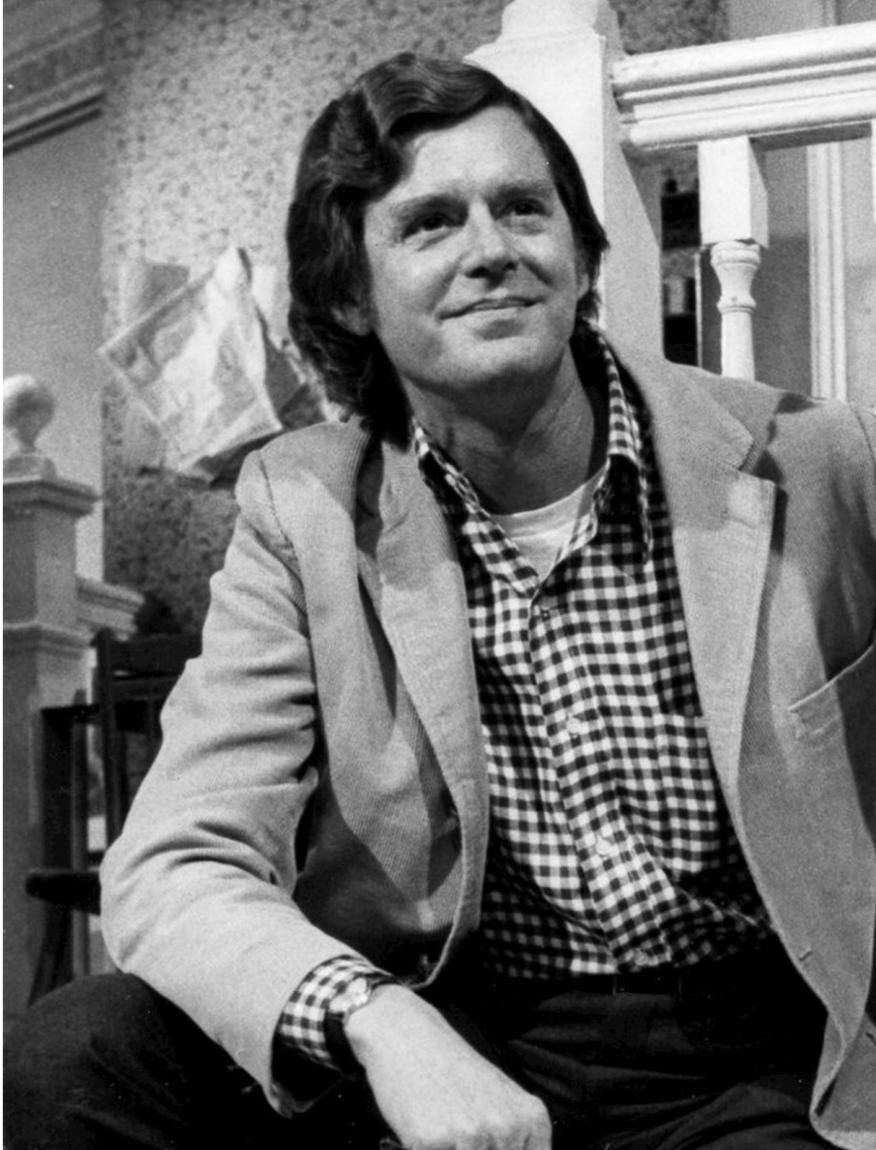




The Waltons Connection to the Civil War

By Norm Dasinger, Jr., August 11, 2020
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Earl Hamner, Jr., on the set of *The Waltons* | CBS Television

Earl Hamner, Jr., created and narrated the popular 1970s family series *The Waltons*. Born in 1932 in Schuyler, Virginia, he was the oldest of eight children. Earl's siblings and his parents and grandparents inspired the Walton family in the popular TV series

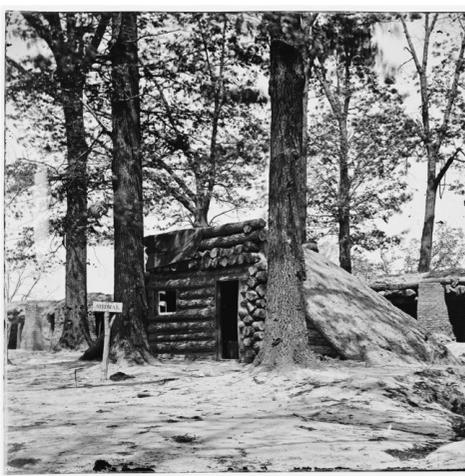
Earl's grandfather was Walter Clifton Hamner, who was born in 1856. While he did not serve in the Confederate Army, his older brother Manoah did.

Manoah enlisted in the 21st Virginia Infantry, Company E, in October 1864, at a time when this unit was serving in the deadly and dangerous trenches at Petersburg under the command of Gen. John B. Gordon and the 2nd Corps. Manoah had no idea that his was to be a short tenure as a member of a unit the locals back home called the "Buckingham Leaches."

On March 25, 1865, the 21st Virginia was brigaded under Gen. William Terry as part of the Gen. Clement Evans Division. Their corps commander had previously approached army leader Gen. Robert E. Lee, proposing a daring breakout plan from the tightening trenches of Petersburg by Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant.



Gen. John B. Gordon | National Archives



Fort Stedman | Library of Congress

That early morning began an attack on Fort Stedman, positioned along the northern sector of the Petersburg trenches. It was led by Col. Eugene Waggaman's Brigade and then came Terry's Brigade, including the 21st Virginia. Initially, Gordon achieved success and at one point he entered the fort to accept the sword from its defender, Gen. Napoleon McLaughlen. From Fort Stedman, Gordon's men were only 10 miles from City Point and Grant's main supply base. Perhaps, if lucky, Gordon could soon be entering that very important wartime facility and, presumably, change the war. It was not to be. As the day began to fill with light, the Union 9th Corps bounded into Gordon's men and the Confederates felt their flanks coming apart. Seeing their opponent waver, the Union commanders attacked with a renewed vigor. One soldier wrote, "I think the columns must have been twenty deep." As the Confederates could not hold up to this pressure, they had to retreat.

When the smoke cleared, the Federals counted more than 1,000 captives, and one of them was Manoah Somers Hamner. He was badly wounded and was sent to Lincoln Memorial Hospital in Washington D.C., where he died on April 5, 1865.

Since the TV show *The Waltons* focused on stories involving Grandpa and John-Boy and the other family members, I wonder if the gallant charge of Manoah and the 21st Virginia at Fort Stedman was perhaps told and retold in the Earl Hamner house near Spencer Mountain, in Buckingham County, Virginia.



John, John Boy, and Olivia Walton from *The Waltons*



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