

On Saturday, October 21<sup>st</sup>, twenty two volunteers entered the old Davis cemetery on Eglin AFB for a Day of Service. Choctawhatchee Bay Daughters of the American Revolution had decided to reclaim this cemetery from the forest after learning of the condition of the gravestone markers and possible desecration of two graves. The group found a chain linked fence surrounded by trees and shrubs overgrowing the resting place for twenty graves.

The group included members from the Choctawhatchee Bay NSDAR, the Emerald Coast Chapter Sons of the American Revolution and the Walton Guard and three persons from the Eglin Cultural Resource Office. Restoration work was divided into four areas: One group would clear the overgrowth of shrubs, one would clean the markers, one would find and try to reconstruct the pieces of monuments and one group would sift the dirt beside the Davis's grave to find possible artifacts.

A colorful history, which is part of early Okaloosa County continues, with the partially exhumed grave of Mr. and Mrs. Davis who were murdered more than a century ago in a robbery on the property of what was then Choctawhatchee Forest. Okaloosa County was only 1 1/2 years old when the elderly couple were killed by Robert Blackwell and his brother William and a third man, Will Boyd.

Born in Alabama, 80-year-old Bud Davis was a Confederate soldier and a member of the Walton Guards who served at Camp Walton. In 1917, the Davises served as lookouts for the U.S. Forestry Service.

He and his wife were shot and killed on March 21, 1917 at their home, which once stood near the cemetery where they are buried. A jury later convicted brothers Robert and William Blackwell and Will Boyd, for the murders.

Supposedly, when Bob demanded the old man's money, Davis, grabbed a Winchester from under his mattress, then hesitated in shooting it. "Robert Blackwell then shot and killed Davis and his wife with a .45 caliber World War I automatic pistol" according to reports at Baker Block museum.

After a nine-day jury trial, the Blackwell brothers were sentenced to hang and Boyd was given life in prison. "But the case was far from over,"

according to a historical account, written by N. Allen Robinson, at the museum. "There were two daring escapes (by the brothers), a retrial granted by the state Supreme Court and William Blackwell died in jail before his sentence could be carried out."

Sometime in the twentieth century the grave was desegregated as the broken headstone, a concrete slab now in pieces had been moved from their original placement. A chain-link fence surrounds the small "Davis Cemetery," which is named for the murder victims, Marius Martin "Bud" Davis and his wife, Nancy Donaldson Davis.

According to the Baker Block Museum a document states that the original headstone read a tribute to Bud Davis, "Here lies the soldiers recompense (sic). His is a patriots grave. Where calm in death reposes. Our noble true and brave."

The tribute to Nancy Davis reads: "March 21, 1917. She was a kind and affectionate wife, a fond mother and a friend to all."

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There are 30 other cemeteries on Eglin according to Joe Meyer, Archeologist who was the guest speaker at a luncheon this summer for the DAR Chapter.

The partial foundation of one such home and the remains of what might have been a well still stand near the Davis Cemetery. This may have been the home but it is not known for certain.

Another monument indicates the resting place of Moses J. MacLenny who was born Jan. 20<sup>th</sup> 1829 and died Dec. 9, 1919. His simple headstone was made from brick on the inside but covered with concrete. His plain headstone which includes "Age 90 – 10 mo 10 dys " looks like it was scratched into the surface of the headstone. Once the DAR finished with the cleaning it clearly said "FATHER" across the top of the stone.

When the group left the cemetery, satisfied with their work, everyone was tired but content that the fenced in area was now a place of order and peace. Sunlight streamed through trees touching the monuments for the first time in years. It was the hope that Mr. and Mrs. Davis and their family

can finally rest in peace knowing that a community cared enough one hundred years after their death to restore order to their family cemetery.