

## CADEN McCOY, 1861

*Caden David McCoy was born November 27, 1848*, to Thomas and Anne McCoy in Rockville County, Virginia. Thomas McCoy was one of five children born to Daniel and Ruth McCoy, immigrants from Ireland. Arthur, John, and Phillip were his three older brothers. Twins, Ezra and Ellen, arrived fourteen months after Caden's birth. Younger siblings, including Rebecca, Isaac, Lucas and Bethany were born between 1851 and 1859. Moving his family from Tennessee in 1853, this tobacco farmer family lived on their modest Virginia plantation, located in the Shenandoah Valley.

Caden began hunting with his brothers at an early age, and his skill with a rifle was notable. His father's intuitiveness and hard working nature were deeply ingrained in his character. Caden's mother taught him and his younger siblings how to read and write from the Bible. Her deep faith and gentle demeanor would also become a part of Caden's makeup.

Life seemed idyllic for the McCoy's and the other families living in the lush Shenandoah Valley. However, all of that was to end. The shelling of Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861 would tragically disrupt and forever change their lives. The War Between the States was to rage across the land for the next four long years. Caden's father and brothers, Arthur and John immediately enlisted for service in the confederate brigade being formed by Col. Thomas Jackson of volunteers from the Shenandoah Valley.

The parting was a difficult and emotional time for everyone. Anne gave her husband a letter to read on their journey, some baked cookies, preserves, and extra socks. Thomas entrusted his young son, Caden, with the family Bible, as he was now the 'man of the house'. He inscribed a few last words inside the cover for Caden to memorize. Thomas and the boys never returned home.

With his father and two older brothers off to war and older brother, Phillip, blinded from complications of typhoid fever, twelve-year-old Caden assumed the responsibilities of the McCoy family farm. Younger brother Ezra and the family's hired hand, Billy, worked alongside him.

The last week in July brought news of the great southern victory at Bull Run. There was great excitement in the McCoy clan. It was known that Gen. Jackson's brigade had participated in the battle. But there was also apprehension. Sadly, it bore fruit. The first week of August, during a pounding rain, two confederate troopers rode up to the house. One of them was carrying a package under his arm. Caden had seen the riders from the barn where he had been hanging up tobacco leaves for curing. He ran to the house as the soldiers were invited inside. They were soaking wet, dripping water in puddles on the floor. The two soldiers removed their hats, introduced themselves as members of the "Stonewall" brigade - the same outfit in which Thomas, Arthur, and John served. They brought bad news. Caden's father had been seriously wounded at Bull Run. The surgery to remove the bullet was successful, but like many of the other wounded, he was without shelter...only wrapped in his blanket and slicker. Chilled from being out in the rain, Thomas caught pneumonia and died.

They handed Mrs. McCoy the package. Caden watched his mother tearfully untie the strings and unfold her husband's slicker with trembling hands. Enclosed were his father's pocket watch, wedding ring, and the letter she had given him when he had ridden off for the last time.

Little did the mourning family know that before year's end, they would learn that Arthur and John had been killed in a later armed skirmish.

The intensity of the war rapidly escalated. As a result, foodstuff, sundry supplies and other necessities grew increasingly scarce. Anne McCoy, a talented seamstress, put her skills to use, creating warm, seamless blankets, cotton duck rain slickers, and other clothing, selling and bartering her creations in exchange for flour, eggs, milk, salt pork, sewing needles, and other necessities.

*Another long, hard day...*not unlike most...found the family clearing up dishes from their evening meal. As twelve-year-old Caden stacked the plates and mugs and blew out the candles, he knocked one over, and the wax spilled onto the tablecloth. Quickly splashing some water in hopes of removing it, he saw the water bead up instead of penetrating the cloth. The realization of what had just happened sent Caden running toward the barn.

Lighting a candle from the oil lamp he carried, he quickly removed his father's slicker from the peg where his mother had hung it. Keeping it inside the house was too painful a reminder, Mrs. McCoy had explained to her children. With trembling hands, Caden purposely dripped candle wax on the sleeve. When it had dried, he poured water over the spot from the water bucket. Again, the water did not soak into the fabric.

Caden was unable to sleep that night. If his father had been able to keep dry out on the battlefield...maybe, just maybe he would have survived his wound! Hot tears stung his eyes until he finally dozed off to sleep.

The next morning, Caden quickly dress and headed out to the barn. If melted wax had worked, would unheated candle wax produce the same results? He grabbed a candle and was soon vigorously rubbing the stub over the cotton duck. Water again did not penetrate the treated area.

Mrs. McCoy listened as Caden excitedly reported his previous evening and early morning experiments. She sighed. Was it really possible? Would something so simple make a garment repel water? Could her husband have benefited from this discovery? Why now, when it was too late for him? She breathed a silent prayer. Thomas would be so proud of their son. He would want them to proceed...to do all they could to help his fellow soldiers stay warm and dry. Perhaps this was God's will...her contribution to help alleviate some of the suffering of others.

The next two months passed quickly. Anne and the girls worked tirelessly on the cotton duck slickers, and Caden, Ezra, and Billy worked together applying the candle wax. Early in their work, they hung finished slickers outside in the rain, anxiously waiting for the results...which were very satisfying. News of the tough, sturdy 'rainproof' slickers spread, and soon all the local population became regular customers. Everyone knew that cotton duck yarn would swell up when wet and become 'self-sealing', yet inevitably the water still penetrated. But the 'McCoy' slicker was truly waterproof, yet very breathable, and it wore like iron.

The McCoy's were soon overwhelmed with orders and enlisted additional help from their neighbors. The long cotton duck slicker/duster ended up becoming part of the military uniforms...especially the cavalry.

Soon, there was no more cotton duck to be had for making the 'McCoy' slicker. Caden again came to the rescue! Intuitively, he took the tarpaulin from one of the wagons parked by the barn and asked his mother if it would work. Of course it would! They were back in business!

*Caden's thirteenth birthday* was coming. Unknown to Caden and the rest of the family, Anne took her husband's slicker from the barn, treated it with the special wax compound, embroidered a label and sewed it inside. It read, '*Caden McCoy-1861*' - the year the Civil War began, the year of his father's death, and the start of their family business. Everyone had tears in their eyes as Caden tried on the over-sized slicker. They all knew what it meant...Caden had become a man. Anne declared that the waterproof slickers would now be known as '*Caden*' slickers.

For the next four years there would be almost constant fighting going on up and down the Shenandoah Valley. Late one night, the McCoy family struggles culminated with the burning of the barn and all of the other outbuildings by the union forces. Under orders, union soldiers were to destroy the McCoy's and all the other local farmers' ability to produce crops of any kind. If it had not been for a small patrol of confederate cavalry who spotted the blaze from a distance, the McCoy's would have also lost their home...and the ability to make the unique water-repelling '*Caden*' slickers. Caden was able to retrieve his father's scorched slicker and several cases of candles from the barn before the heat became too intense. Burns to his left hand would leave it permanently scarred. The pile of used tents and tarpaulins lying beside the barn were left untouched, apparently considered to be a scrap pile.

Indeed, the cavalry patrol was on its way to the McCoy's! They had been sent by Gen. 'Jeb' Stuart to procure as many of the '*Caden*' slickers as possible for his forces. A cavalry troop ended up being stationed in the area to keep any union raids from interrupting the production of the now-famous slickers, and the slicker business continued to flourish until the ravages of the war took its toll.

The surrender of General Lee's army at Appomattox mercifully ended the war. However, it did nothing to alleviate the suffering of residents in the Shenandoah Valley and much of the rest of the south.

*Joseph McCoy was one of eleven* children born to David Jeremiah and Mary (Kirkpatrick) McCoy. David was Daniel McCoy's younger brother. They raised their

children on neighboring farms, and Joseph was quite close to Thomas, Caden's father. He was born in Tennessee and moved to Illinois eight years prior to the outbreak of the war - part of a keelboat adventure down the Ohio River, with two of his brothers. After establishing himself on a partially cleared, but incredibly rich bottomland farm, Joseph married Sarah Epler in 1855.

When the war started, he reasoned that the union army would need to be fed - that meant a steady food supply. As a result, he and his two brothers embarked on the cattle business. Joseph's visionary zeal made him a very wealthy man. He began procuring cattle for the rapidly expanding meat packinghouses in Chicago that, in turn, supported the union war effort.

There had been no news of Thomas or his family since the start of the war. And, as soon as the war ended, Joseph immediately dispatched a trusted friend to search them out. He discovered that Thomas, Arthur and John had died, and he found the rest of the family in desperate living conditions, just barely alive, at the old McCoy plantation. Anne McCoy and her family were rescued at last! They packed their meager possessions and journeyed to their new home in Illinois. Joseph and Sarah welcomed Thomas's widow and children into their spacious home.

*The demand for beef exploded* after the end of the war and far outstripped supply. In early 1867, Joseph established shipping stockyards for cattle on the railroad siding in Abilene, Kansas. The idea was to get the Texans, who were overrun with cattle, to bring their herds north to him, who in turn, would feed the insatiable appetite of the northern markets.

Joseph asked his second-generation cousin, Caden, if he'd ride south across Indian Territory to Texas with a couple of his men, and spread the word that there was a cattle buyer in Abilene who would buy all the beef they had. Also, Caden was to buy a herd and drive them north himself - thus, establishing the credibility of his 'uncle's' offer. Caden and his siblings had called Joseph, 'Uncle Joe' since he could remember.

The rest is history. Caden drove the first herd of more than 1500 longhorns north in the late summer of 1867, over what was to become the 'Old McCoy' Trail to Abilene. The following year, there were over 75,000 more cattle driven north to Abilene. Within three years, the number of cattle would exceed 600,000 head.

The cattle drivers were quick to embrace the long-legged '*Caden*' slickers. They even gave the garment its unique name "fish" because of its incredible talent for almost 'living' in the rain. The slicker was also worn when it wasn't raining. With thousands of cattle stirring up the dust, the '*Caden*' was worn to keep the dust off - and the name of 'duster' was born. 'Slicker', 'fish', 'duster'...they were all the same...the '*Caden*'! No cowboy was caught outside without one tied to the back of his saddle.

Anne and her family had all the business they could handle taking care of the cowboys coming up the trail. And, soon, homesteaders that were pouring into the new state of Kansas also wanted the high-abrasion, sturdy, waterproof garments. A shorter version of the '*Caden*' was born: the 'chore' coat style.

*As a man of twenty-five*, Caden had been 'up the trail' as trail boss on five herds for his Uncle Joe, had been through several skirmishes with Comanches, fought off would-be

rustlers and ‘toll’ collectors, endured countless stampedes, swum numerous high-water crossings, and experienced all the weather mother-nature could throw at him and his crew. He was deadly with his rifle, fast with his gun, trusted by his men, and respected as a God-fearing, straight-dealing man. He loved the adventure and freedom of the open plains as seen from the hurricane seat of a good horse. Often, the canopy of a million sparkling stars would find Caden reading his Bible by the campfire light.

April 6, 1873, had begun like any other day. Opting to ride on ahead and scout the area several miles ahead of the herd, Caden was to return to camp before sundown. He never came back.

The following day the search began at daybreak. On the third day a group of drovers came to a rocky ledge and noticed something tucked into the rocks. They found a weathered slicker with a label inside, ‘*Caden McCoy-1861*’. It was wrapped around the well-worn Bible that Caden always carried with him. Inside the cover under the name, Thomas McCoy, was penned:

*“To my son, Caden, there are no better words than these to live by.*

*‘Do good by yer neighbor,  
Show kindness when ye can,  
Don’t take yerself too serious,  
An don’t forget the Good Lord.’*

*MICAH 6:8*

*God bless, Dad”*

*APRIL 23, 1861*

All the drovers agreed that Caden had followed his father’s sage advice and was surely now in the bosom of the Lord.

Throughout his short life of twenty-five years, Caden is remembered for his faithfulness to God, devotion to his family, and a calm demeanor in the face of all kinds of adversity, along with fearless courage in every danger.

And, Caden is remembered for the legendary ‘*Caden*’ waterproof slicker – the one he discovered in 1861, worn by Gen. J.E.B Stuart, C.S.A., and his men in the Civil War, and by the hundreds of Texas cowboys that went ‘up the trail’ on cattle drives.

...It was the most valued possession a cowboy had after his hat, gun, and boots.

*The McCoy clan was prominent in Virginia prior to the Civil War; and relocated to Illinois after the war.*

*Joseph McCoy is widely recognized as the originator of the Texas cattle drives. The ‘Old McCoy’ Trail, blazed by the first McCoy herd of longhorns in 1867, can be traced from Texas to Abilene, Kansas. It later became known as the Chisholm Trail.*

*The McCoy cattle drovers were either relatives or employees of Joe McCoy. It has been surmised that Caden McCoy was the trail boss, but there is no documented proof of Caden McCoy's participation that has been, as yet, authenticated.*

*However, and most importantly, the character and integrity that Caden represents reflects the values held by this company.*

