

Hezekiah Thomas Civil War Engagements

On February 25th 1862 Hezekiah enrolled for a three year service at Mt. Carmel Illinois in Company C of the Illinois, 12th Regiment Calvary (Volunteers), commanded by Captain S. Branson.¹ Hezekiah mustered-in as a private February 28th 1862 at Springfield Illinois.²

The companies of the 12th were commanded by Colonel Arno Voss, and the executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Hasbrouck Davis. As the companies were being organized, the regiment went into training at Camp Douglas near Chicago. Not long afterward the companies were sent to Camp Butler, six miles from Springfield Illinois. It would be at Camp Butler were the men would be schooled and trained to become a soldier. The 12th would also improve their organization by forming platoons and battalions, and re-organizing their companies.

In 1860 Hezekiah lived in Sterling, Whiteside County Illinois. He travelled 326 miles south to enlist in Mt Carmel, Wabash County Illinois. Wabash was not represented in the makeup of the Illinois counties, but Hezekiah was assigned to Company C.

As spring approached the 12th began to receive equipment, and horses began to arrive. By the end of spring each man was issued a horse, and except for their carbine rifles they were fully equipped. On March 13th 1862 the 12th Illinois were attached to the Army of the Potomac; 1st Army Corp (Brigade), 2nd Division, as the 12th Army Corps was being organized.

The next month, April 1862, Hezekiah's wife, Elizabeth, and the children returned to Luzerne County Pennsylvania. This would be the last time Hezekiah would see his family, because on June 25th 1862 the 12th Illinois was ordered from Camp Butler in Illinois to Martinsburg, West Virginia.

By June 27th, the 12th was an eight company regiment with about seven hundred men, commanded by Colonel Arno Voss. The youngest soldier was sixteen and the oldest was forty eight. Hezekiah was 37 years old.

The regiment left Camp Butler and travelled six miles to the Springfield train depot where they were to proceed by train to Wheeling Virginia. (now West Virginia) There the 12th would be attached to the District of Martinsburg, for duty at Martinsburg and on the Upper Potomac.³ While in Martinsburg the Illinois 12th were under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Davis.

After several delays, the 12th Illinois and their horses arrived about midnight in Wheeling Virginia. They immediately set up in Camp Carlisle on an island in the middle of the Ohio River between Bridgeport Ohio, and Wheeling Virginia.

On July 4th 1862 the 12th Illinois were the parade vanguard through downtown wheeling. On the 7th the regiment was ordered to Camp Wool, near Martinsburg Virginia (now West Virginia), on

¹ Hezekiah was enrolled as Henry Thomas, which was later changed to reflect his name Hezekiah Thomas.

² Residence if Du Page County, Illinois made up of Company C, 12th Illinois Cavalry, which formed February 24th 1862, and ended May 29th 1866.

³ Hezekiah Thomas Civil War Engagements, Taylor ~ Graham, 479 County Line Road, York Springs, PA

the Martinsburg-Winchester Turnpike. While there the 12th were issued Burnside carbine rifles, which fired a .54 caliber round.

Throughout July and August the 12th became familiar with their weapons and trained for search and destroy, and reconnaissance missions to help control the increasing numbers of southern succession riots, and bands of Confederate partisans and guerrillas. The guerrillas were using the remote northern Virginia and Shenandoah Mountains to strike at Union railroads and garrisons.

During the last weeks of summer the bands of Confederate partisans increased. By September 3rd 1862 the 12th Illinois Cavalry were still camped at Camp Wool near Martinsburg West Virginia when the Confederate Commander, General Lee, began moving his army of 55,000 across the Potomac River at White's Ford near Leesburg Virginia. Historians would later refer to Lee's Confederate and Union Commander, McClellan's, actions as part of the Maryland Campaign or Antietam Campaign, which occurred between 3rd and the 23rd of September 1862.

During the 1st few weeks of September small-scale battles and skirmishes began to erupt throughout Central Maryland. In response the Union commander, McClellan, temporarily organized the Army of the Potomac into three wings for the attacks on the three South Mountain passes; the right wing was sent to Turner's Gap and Fox's Gap in the north; the left wing was sent to Crampton's Gap in the south.

Hezekiah and his 12th Illinois Cavalry Regiment were assigned the center wing (II Corps and XII Corps), under Maj. Gen. Edwin V. Sumner, was in reserve. The 12th was then incorporated in with the 65th Illinois Infantry, 125th New York Infantry, and Battery M of the 2nd Illinois Artillery under the command of Brigadier General Julius White.

On the morning of September 6th 1862, Hezekiah and Company C were assigned to a pickets⁴ and vedettes⁵ along the Winchester Turnpike, while Companies F and G remained at the garrison in Martinsburg, under the command of Colonel Voss. About five miles south of Martinsburg on the Winchester Turnpike, a small scouting party from the 12th Illinois Cavalry surprised Confederate troops that were conducting a recruiting meeting at Bunker Hill Virginia. (now West Virginia).

By September 7th 1862, the Confederate army was marching into Frederick Maryland. At this time General Robert E. Lee continued north, concentrating at Hagerstown for a possible march into Pennsylvania. Lee was worried about the Union garrisons disrupting his communications and supply lines. When he learned that the Union garrison at Harper's Ferry, under the command of Colonel Dixon S. Miles, was not retreating Lee sent Major General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson south to surround Harper's Ferry and capture it, and other Confederates troops went west across South Mountain, then north toward Hagerstown.

At day break Saturday morning, September 7th, Confederate troops had been largely reinforced, decided to capture Lieutenant Colonel Hasbrouck Davis and his 12th Illinois command. The

⁴ A camp picket refers to soldiers or troops placed on a line forward of a position to warn against an enemy advance

⁵ A camp vedette is a sentinel, usually on horseback, stationed on the outpost of an army, to watch an enemy and give notice of danger.

Confederate troops would make a bold attempt to get to the rear of the 12th Illinois, and cut them off from their camp at Martinsburg. Anticipating this movement, Davis sent out a small party from Company G, under Lieutenant Thomas Logan, to reconnoiter. Not long afterwards the detachment was surrounded by Confederate troops, but succeeded in cutting their way through the advancing Confederate troops. On their retreat they came upon Lieutenant Colonel Hasbrouck Davis, and reported the Confederate troop's superior numbers. Davis immediately requested reinforcements from Colonel Voss in Martinsburg, who sent Davis troops from Company A of the 12th Illinois Cavalry, the 65th Illinois Infantry, and a three gun section from Battery M of the 2nd Illinois Artillery.

With a vigorous charge the Union troops routed the enemy and drove them five miles south of Martinsburg to a small town of Darkesville in Morgan County Virginia. (now West Virginia) A fight ensued and the Union forces drove the Confederate troops out of Darkesville, chasing them ten to twelve miles further south back toward the town of Bunker Hill. The 12th Illinois Cavalry succeeded in driving back several hundred of the enemy, killing twenty-five and taking fifty prisoners, with no losses of their own. A few days later, Hezekiah and the 12th rejoined General White's command, and continued to performed outpost duties; pickets ⁶ and vedettes ⁷ in and round Camp Wool in Martinsburg.

On September 12th 1862 the 12th Illinois Cavalry received news that Confederate troops had crossed the Potomac at Boteler's Ford in Shepherdstown Jefferson County, Virginia. (now West Virginia), and were advancing on Williamsport. The men of the 12th were told to pack or burn everything, and late that evening boarded trains and headed 22 miles south to reinforce the Union Federal Arsenal at Harpers Ferry. The troops arrived at Harpers Ferry at two o'clock in the morning of September 13th. By eleven o'clock that morning, Confederate artillery troops under the command of A.P. Hill began to arrive, taking up positions on the heights overlooking the town. The 12th Illinois Cavalry was immediately sent out to scout the Confederate movements.

On the morning of September 14th, 1862, as the 12th Illinois were resting in their garrison in Loudoun Heights, on the west end of Shenandoah Street of Harpers Ferry, near the industrial area of Virginius Island. Major General Stonewall Jackson and A.P. Hill positioned nearly 50 guns on Maryland Heights and at the base of Loudoun Heights. As Confederate shells began to hit 12th Illinois garrison, they immediately began to saddle up their horses, and sought protection in the trees of Virginius Island.

During the day of being bombarded, it became clear that the Union forces were surrounded on all sides, and they could be captured. No one in the Union command wanted the arms and horses to fall into Confederate hands, or for the troops be sent to confederate prisons. Escaping Harpers Ferry then became a an option, and a plan was discussed between Lieutenant Colonel Hasbrouck Davis of the 12th Illinois Cavalry and the ranking Federal officer, Colonel Benjamin "Grimes" Davis. Together they approached Brigadier General Julius White with the plan, who deferred to Colonel Miles. Miles disapproved of the plan, but after conferring with White and others approved the daring escape. The plan was to depart at night, cross the Potomac on a pontoon

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bridge that was built in the early days of the war, toward Maryland Heights, and proceed to General McClellan's army in the direction of Sharpsburg. Special Order Number 120 was issued September 14th 1862, by aide-de-camp, H.C. Reynolds. The orders read:

The Calvary force at this post, except detached orderlies, will make immediate preparations to leave here at 8 o'clock tonight, without baggage, wagons, ambulances or lead horses, crossing the Potomac over the pontoon bridge, and taking the Sharpsburg Road. The senior officer, Colonel Voss, will assume command of the whole, which will form the right at the quartermaster's office, the left up Shenandoah street, without noise or loud command, in the following order: 12th Illinois Calvary, 8th New York Calvary, 7th Squadron Rhode Island Calvary, and the 1st Maryland Calvary. No other instructions can be given to the Commander than to force his way through the enemy lines and join our own army.

At eight o'clock that Sunday night, the 12th Illinois Calvary formed their ranks under the Confederate guns on Maryland Heights. They crossed Potomac Street, and began descending over the sea wall, regiment by regiment, walking single file to the pontoon bridge. Slow movement would aid in keeping quiet, and not heard by the surrounding confederate troops. After crossing the bridge, the regiments proceeded along the Harpers Ferry and Sharpsburg road. As the regiments descended Maryland Height, with the 12th Illinois in the lead of the column, they proceeded at a gallop until they reached Sharpsburg, some twenty miles from Harpers Ferry. The column quietly passed through the principle streets of Sharpsburg on the road toward Hagerstown Maryland. Maneuvering between confederate camps, the regiments reached the Sharpsburg-Hagerstown Turnpike.

The confederate troops in the area of Sharpsburg where retreating from the battle of South Mountain. The column continued north on the Sharpsburg-Hagerstown Turnpike until they reached a local mill, they turned toward the Boonsboro and Williamsport Turnpike. At five o'clock, in the early morning hours, of September 15th 1862, the 8th New York Calvary was at the head of the column, when they came upon a large Confederate camp just north of Williamsport Maryland. As the 8th New York Calvary proceeded they heard sounds of wagons or artillery approaching. The 8th formed on the in line facing the road, and the 12th Illinois formed a line south of the road. As the wagons approached they were ordered to surrender. The captured wagons contained ammunition for Confederate Major General Longstreet's corp.

Meanwhile back at Harpers Ferry, September 15th 1862, Major General Stonewall Jackson began a fierce artillery barrage from all sides and ordered an infantry assault on Harpers Ferry. Colonel Miles realized that the situation was hopeless and agreed with his subordinates to raise the white flag of surrender. Before Miles could surrender personally, he was mortally wounded by an artillery shell and died the next day, September 16th 1862. After processing more than 12,000 Union prisoners, Jackson's men then rushed to Sharpsburg, Maryland, to rejoin Lee for the Battle of Antietam.

The 12th had travelled over sixty miles in 24 hours, without rations, when they reached Greencastle Pennsylvania. While there they rested and ate, 30 miles south, the Union and

Confederate armies began to maneuver in and around Sharpsburg. On the misty early morning of September 17th 1862, the armies collided. On the ridges above Sharpsburg and along Antietam Creek, American soldiers met in the bloodiest day of the war.

The 12th were still in Greencastle before moving south to rejoin General McClellan, at Sharpsburg. The captured confederate wagons were sent to the Federal ammunitions depot in Chambersburg Pennsylvania. When the 12th arrived on September 17th 1862, the battle of Antietam had ended, with neither side gaining any real advantage during the fighting that day. The 12th Illinois Calvary was assigned to guard General McClellan's army's extreme right flank at Jones Crossing near Tilghmanton Maryland, 8 miles north of Sharpsburg

On September 19th 1862, two days after the last shot was fired at Antietam, Lee began his plans to retreat across the Potomac near Shepherdstown West Virginia. Jeb Stuart of the Confederate Army remained 13 miles north of Sharpsburg in Williamsport Maryland; the extreme right flank of the Union Army. Believing Stuart was mounting an attack on the river town of Williamsport, the Union Commander, McClellan, slowed his pursuit of Lee's retreat, and sent Brigadier General John Kenly's large Calvary force to Williamsport to secure the Union's flank. Kenly's Calvary troops included seven of the twelve companies of the 12th Illinois Calvary.

On September 20th 1862 Kenly reported that Williamsport was occupied by Stuarts 1000 man Calvary, and it would take more than his 600 Calvary troops to take Williamsport. Union command reinforced Kenly's forces with an additional 800 infantry and artillery troops bring his total strength to 1200 troops. As Kenly advanced toward the Potomac, he ordered the 12th Illinois Calvary to take the lead toward the river town of Williamsport.

Moving quickly, the 12th arrived unnoticed, and for two days Company I of the 12th were surrounded by retreating Confederate troops. On the second day, September 22nd a sharp fight took place, "...and one member of the 12th Illinois, Private H. Thomas from Sterling, Illinois, was killed by a bullet that entered through his nose and exited through the back of his head. Private William Henry Redman left the area of the skirmish on the dead man's horse..."⁸

Hezekiah Thomas is the H. Thomas noted in the book's passage by William Redman. Hezekiah died, September 22nd 1862, of a gunshot wound suffered in a charge during the skirmish in Williamsport.⁹

After evading capture, Redman and his small detachment returned to Sharpsburg; camping on the Antietam battlefield, as grace diggers worked around the clock clearing the battlefield of the dead. By September 23rd the 12th Illinois Calvary camped at the village of Jones Crossroads.

During the course of the Civil War, the 12th Illinois Cavalry Regiment lost 38 enlisted men killed or mortally wounded and 4 officers and 192 enlisted men to disease during the Civil War.

⁸ Page 39, chapter three, In *The First Line of Battle, The 12th Illinois Calvary, in the Civil War*, by Samuel M. Blackwell, Jr. Northern Illinois University Press, DeKalb Illinois, 2002

⁹ Letter, dated June 12th 1864, attached to Hezekiah Thomas Window Pension File, Taylor ~ Graham Library, 479 County Line Road, York Springs PA. 17372

The family believes Hezekiah was buried in the Gettysburg Solders Park, Adams County Pennsylvania.¹⁰ There is no record of his burial, and is hasn't been verified.

On November 16th 1862, the grand army began to move by parallel routes. The 12th Illinois Cavalry was called away from picket and assigned to Sigel's Army, and act as its escort from Warrenton to Fredericksburg, where they frequently had severe brushes with scouting parties of J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry.

Bibliography

Hezekiah Thomas Civil War Pension File: Application Number 30229, Pension Certificate Number: 30229, National Archives at College Park, 8601 Adelphi Road, College Park, MD 20740-6001

¹⁰ There is an H.S Thomas buried in the Gettysburg Solders Park, Adams County Pennsylvania. The ground marker was laid among the Pennsylvania site, and it indicated this Thomas was in Company I of the 145th Pennsylvania Regiment. We also found a Civil War Index card that listed Salmon Thomas, C – 145 I , 4 – 532. We located a Salmon Thomas that was in Company C of the 145th PA Regiment, who died in Parole Camp Annapolis Hospital in Maryland on June 12th 1863. There's no document to say where he was buried. Solomon is not our Thomas.

Hezekiah Thomas 12th Illinois Calvary: In The First Line of Battle, The 12th Illinois Calvary, in the Civil War, by Samuel M. Blackwell, Jr. Northern Illinois University Press, DeKalb Illinois, 2002