

150 Years Ago in the Third Infantry

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Introduction

The regimental staff and band and Companies B, D, G, H, and K of the Third Infantry are stationed in Franklin Square in Washington City and serving as part of the City Guard. Companies C and E have been part of the garrison defending Fort Pickens, Florida, since April 1861. Companies A, F, and I, which were captured in Matagorda Bay, Texas, before they even knew war had broken out, are slowly filling with recruits at Fort Columbus, New York. The regiment had 434 enlisted men added to its rolls in 1861, mostly recruits from the General Depot. However, 345 enlisted men deserted during 1861, and only 30 of these deserters were ever apprehended. The companies in Washington begin 1862 with a full complement of noncommissioned officers and between 62 and 68 privates. Very few of the three commissioned officers of each company are present with the regiment. Most of commissioned officers are on detached service elsewhere. A few are on parole, having been captured with Companies A, F, and I in Texas, and two officers are still being held as prisoners of war in the South after being captured in the First Battle of Bull Run. Most of the officers present with the companies in Washington City were graduates of the United States Military Academy in 1861 or civilian appointments.

January 1862

January 1, 1862

Another bombardment occurs at Fort Pickens, Florida, when a rebel steamer approaches the navy-yard near Pensacola at about 3:00 p.m. This is the first instance of a rebel vessel coming within range of the guns of Fort Pickens since the November bombardments and Colonel Harvey Brown, Union commander of the besieged fort, views the vessel's approach as an act of bravado or a deliberate attempt to draw fire. Colonel Brown responds to the provocation by ordering the vessel to be fired upon, which is done three times while she lay at the wharf. While Colonel Brown considers the affair to be closed, the acting Confederate commander General Richard Anderson escalates the exchange by ordering the rebel batteries ringing Pensacola Bay to open fire. A brisk cannonade results that is kept up by both sides until it is too dark to see. Mortar fire continues sporadically until 4:00 a.m.

Like the November bombardments, few casualties are sustained by either side. Only two enlisted men of the Fort Pickens' garrison are injured, neither soldier from Companies C and E at the fort. Colonel Brown reports that an almost festival mood prevailed during the fight as the enlisted men seemed to consider it a New Year's amusement. He says that their firing was excellent and that he has rarely or never seen better. He closes his report by "respectfully and earnestly recommend[ing] to the executive justice the brave men who have now three times so faithfully defended their country's flag, and who for their reward have in several instances had the mortification of seeing their juniors placed over their heads, and who have never heard the first cheering word of approval for their former gallant deeds."

The Confederate General Braxton Bragg, who returned to the Army of Pensacola during the bombardment, reports less satisfactory results to his superiors. While damage was light, Union shells did succeed in setting fire to, and destroying, a large storehouse at the navy-yard filled with military supplies. His own batteries fired irregularly and apparently without effect or an objective other than the expenditure of considerable ammunition they cannot afford to waste. He places the blame for the entire affair on General Anderson's shoulders. It is represented

that General Anderson was intoxicated and entirely unfit for duty at the time he gave the orders to open fire. (OR I 6:495-98)

January 1, 1862

The Union officers who have been held at Fort Sumter, Charleston Harbor, as prisoners of war are transferred to Columbia, South Carolina. The officers are met at the station by guards and conducted to the city jail. The transferred officers probably include Lieutenant Jacob Kent of Company B, who had been wounded at the First Battle of Bull Run and captured. It had earlier been reported that Lieutenant Kent was held at Fort Sumter. Captain William Dickinson of Company H had also been held at Fort Sumter, as learned from a notation on a return of Company A for September 1861 filed with the regimental returns. But he was transferred already and was in Richmond in December.

January 2, 1862

After more than five months of captivity in Richmond, Captain William Dickinson of Company H arrives at Fortress Monroe from nearby Norfolk under a flag of truce as part of an exchange of prisoners. Captain Dickinson was severely wounded while serving as acting adjutant of the regular battalion at the First Battle of Bull Run and was taken prisoner when the Union troops abandoned their field hospitals to the enemy. He is exchanged for Lieutenant John Tattnell of Savannah Georgia, late of the United States Marine Corps, who is forwarded to Norfolk on January 17th. Lieutenant Tattnell was not a prisoner as a result of being captured in battle; rather he was arrested for disloyalty on October 7, 1861, when he attempted to resign his commission in October 1861. Lieutenant Dickinson returns to Washington City the next day.

Captain Dickinson was put forward by the Confederates for exchange, along with seven other officers, upon the opinion of the rebel captain commanding the prison in Richmond that these officers "are those least likely to be efficient for harm to the Confederacy in the event, not probable, that they again enter the service of the United States." In the case of Captain Dickinson, the opinion is correct. He immediately avails himself of a leave of absence to recover from his lingering wounds at his mother's home in Connecticut. He is unable to return to active service and, after duty in New York City and Connecticut, retires in October 1863 in consequence of disability resulting from his wounds. Captain Dickinson served as second lieutenant of Company B from September 1857 to May 1861. (OR II 2:155; 3:207,753; Wash Star)

January 3, 1862

Washington City has been suffering under a different kind of bombardment recently. The many regimental bands in and around the city have made a habit of roaming the streets at night serenading anybody and everybody. On New Year's eve, so many bands tried to approach the residence of Major-General George McClellan that a detachment of the Provost Guard was required to block the street to ensure the General's rest. To control the nuisance, Provost Marshal Andrew Porter issues General Order No. 1 of the new year prohibiting any band in the service of the United States from performing in the streets unless permission is obtained in advance from the Office of the Provost Marshal.

The Provost Marshal also orders all establishments serving liquor to close by 9:30 pm each evening. The Washington Star applauds this effort to control the "night grog-shop nuisance" and warns that anyone who "ventures to keep such places open after 9:30 pm may rely on it that their turn will soon come to go up to the captain's office (guard house) and settle." The owners of Washington's many bars, restaurants, and hotels are less enthusiastic about the new order. (Wash Star 1/1/62 2:2; RG 393, I:E-4052)

January 3, 1862

Several officers of the Provost Guard in Washington City are given the unpleasant duty of arresting Captain Thomas Turner of Company H of the Fourth Infantry following Captain Turner's shooting of a bugler in the Fourth Cavalry. The shooting occurred on Pennsylvania Avenue near the National Hotel on Sixth Street. About 2:30 p.m., Bugler John Halter was acquainting a skittish horse with the smell of buffalo robes hanging in front of a store. Bugler Halter's handling of the animal attracted an appreciative crowd of about 150 persons. Captain Turner, who was walking along Pennsylvania Avenue with Lieutenant George Randall of his regiment, noticed the crowd and stopped to investigate. Although he was not on duty as an Officer of Patrols at the time, Captain Turner felt it was his duty to disperse the crowd and ordered Bugler Halter away.

Captain Turner represented himself as an officer of the Provost Guard and he was wearing a military overcoat and hat. Bugler Halter said he was also a member of the Provost Guard and questioned the right of Turner to give such an order. The crowd quickly took Halter's side in the matter and several civilians made remarks about officers controlling the city and wanting to interfere where they had no business. To secure reinforcements, Captain Turner requested a passing officer to bring back a sentinel or patrol. Bugler Halter decided not to wait for their arrival and began to walk his horse toward Seventh Street. Now, Captain Turner did not want the bugler to leave and twice ordered the bugler to halt. Bugler Halter responded in what was described as a very insolent manner that he would not do so. Captain Turner, seeing his orders disregarded and authority called into contempt, thereupon drew his revolver and fired at the departing bugler from a distance of about 25 yards. The ball entered Halter's back near the spine and he exclaimed "I am shot".

Cavalry officers described Bugler Halter, a nine-year veteran, as one of their best men, sober, honest, intelligent, reliable, and one of the best horsemen in the country. Ironically, it was his horsemanship that attracted the crowd and brought Captain Turner to order him away. Bugler Halter will survive the wound, upon his discharge the next year, joins the staff of the Secretary of War as a messenger.

Captain Turner joined the Fourth Infantry as a second lieutenant in California in 1858. He accompanied the regiment to Washington City in November 1861. At his request, a Court of Inquiry consisting of Generals George Stoneman and George Sykes and Captain Gustavis DeRussy convenes in mid-January to examine the circumstances surrounding the shooting. The Court interviews several civilians and officers who observed the incident. A notable exception to the witnesses is Bugler Halter, who is not called to testify. The Court recommends that no further proceeding be taken in the case, concluding that "though the measure adopted by Captain Turner was extreme, and, under the circumstances, a wiser discretion might not have resorted to it, yet, in time of war, the enforcement of his authority, and the maintenance of military discipline, was paramount to any other consideration." Major-General McClellan confirms the finding of the Court, noting that Captain Turner used the only means at his disposal to enforce obedience to his orders by a soldier whose name and regiment were unknown.

January 3, 1862

An exchange of 240 enlisted men who are prisoners of war takes place on the James River nine miles upstream from Newport News, Virginia. The Union soldiers, nearly all of them captured by the rebels at First Bull Run, left Richmond at 7am aboard the rebel steamer Northhampton. They are transferred in midstream to the Union steamer George Washington out of Fortress Monroe. According to an eyewitness, "cheer after cheer arose from each boat as they approached and such happy looking men are seldom seen." The band of the Fourth Artillery on board the George Washington plays "Home, sweet Home" during the exchange.

The festive atmosphere continues as the former prisoners are transported to Fortress Monroe. The rigging of the ships of the blockading squadron off Newport News are filled with cheering sailors as the steamer passes, and the garrison at nearby Camp Butler crowds the shoreline to watch their comrades pass. Upon their arrival at Fortress Monroe at 5:30 pm, the former prisoners are transferred to another vessel for passage to Baltimore, Maryland. They are entertained by the Union Relief Association in Baltimore and finally return to Washington on January 4th.

Three members of the Third Infantry are among the lucky soldiers released after five and a half months of captivity: Private James Carroll of Company B and Privates John McPhillips and Mark Wight of Company H. Privates Carroll and McPhillips were among the 26 enlisted men listed as missing in action after the Battle of Bull Run on July 21st. Private Wight literally returns from the dead. He was listed as killed in action on the regimental return for July 1861. They rejoin the battalion in Washington City on January 6th.

January 6, 1862

Detachments of all the regular troops in Washington City assemble to view the military execution of Private George Lanahan of Company A of the Second Infantry who was convicted of the murder of Sergeant Brennan of his company.

While posted as a guard in Georgetown last October, Private Lanahan used his musket to shoot Sergeant Brennan when the sergeant passed his guardpost. The presumed motive for the shooting was revenge for a previous altercation between the parties. The sentinels in Georgetown typically carried unloaded arms so Private Lanahan had secretly loaded his musket to carry out the attack. Clemency was impossible in such a case, and Major-General George McClellan confirmed the sentence of the military court that Private Lanahan "be hanged by the neck until he be dead, on Monday, the 6th day of January 1862, at such time and place within the limits of this District as the Provost Marshal of Washington and Georgetown may direct."

Private Lanahan is held at the Central Guardhouse while awaiting the execution. At 9:30 a.m., a carriage arrives with a sergeant and guard of the Second Infantry to escort the prisoner to the gallows. Private Lanahan, his hands tied behind his back, emerges from the guardhouse wearing the uniform of his regiment. He is accompanied by two guards and Father Walter of St Patrick's Catholic Church. Another soldier, having with him the rope for the execution, mounts the box of the carriage with the driver. The carriage proceeds to Franklin Square, quarters of the Third Infantry, where detachments of the Second, Third, Fourth, Sixth, and Tenth Infantries are forming to accompany the procession. The carriage is placed in the center of the column, which marches without music to the public commons between O and P Streets near Vermont Avenue. The troops form a hollow square in the snow-covered field surrounding a recently constructed scaffold and come to an 'order arms'.

At 11:15 a.m., the prisoner emerges from the carriage with Father Walter and the two guards and ascends the steps of the scaffold. Lieutenant Frederick Devoe of the Third Infantry then reads in a loud voice the order containing a recapitulation of the facts of the case, the finding of the court, and the sentence. During the reading, Private Lanahan stood calmly on the platform, turning from side to side of the square as if to take a last look at his comrades. When Lieutenant Devoe completes the reading, the troops are brought to a 'parade rest'.

After kneeling with Father Walter for about five minutes, Private Lanahan moves to the north edge of the platform and facing the companies of the Second Infantry exclaims in a loud and steady voice, "Good bye, soldiers, good bye." Private Lanahan's military cap is then removed and replaced with a black hood that covers his entire face. He is placed over the trap and Corporal Brown of the Second Infantry fits the noose around the neck of the condemned

soldier. At 11:30 a.m., Corporal Brown releases the trap. After watching the hanging body about 15 minutes, the surrounding troops march off the field. The body is removed for burial in the City's Catholic Cemetery.

January 20, 1862

Following custom, the regular officers in Washington City call on the new Secretary of War Edwin Stanton at the War Department. The officers of the Provost Guard are lead by Provost Marshal Andrew Porter. The Washington Star reports that "a finer body of young soldiers we never saw than those accompanying him."

January 29, 1862

Senior Major Nathan B. Russell of the Third Infantry assumes command of the five companies (B, D, H, G, and K) stationed in Washington City. Major Russell received his majority in September 1861 upon the retirement of Major Nathaniel Macrae. Major Russell joined the Army from civilian life in 1838 and served in the Mexican War as a captain in the Fifth Infantry. He had been serving in New Mexico since August 1860 and had been encamped at Fort Craig, New Mexico, as late as November 27, 1861. (Henry, vol. 2:182; Regt Return)

The five companies are part of a battalion that, since October 1861, has included Companies B, E, G, and F of the Tenth Infantry. Brigadier General George Sykes, who has commanded the battalion since July 1861, finally terminates his immediate connection with the Third Infantry when he is selected to command all regulars being collected for field duty with the Army of the Potomac. He selects one of the August appointees in the regiment, Second Lieutenant James A. Snyder, to serve on his staff as aide-de-camp. Lieutenant Snyder will serve in this capacity until November 1864. (Powell, Records:557)

The new commander of the battalion of the Third and Tenth Infantries becomes Major Charles Swain Lovell of the Tenth Infantry. Originally enlisting in the Army as a private of artillery in 1830, Major Lovell became a second lieutenant in the Sixth Infantry in October 1837. He rose to the rank of captain in June 1846. His promotion to major in May 1861 makes him senior to Major Russell and entitles him to command the battalion. He will eventually command the second brigade of regulars during the Peninsula and Maryland campaigns. Sometime in March the battalion of the Third and Tenth Infantries is dissolved and each regiment operates independently thereafter.