

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.

February 1862

February 3, 1862

The Senate confirms the promotion to Brigadier General of Volunteers of Captain Alexander McDowell McCook and Captain William T.H. Brooks of the Third Infantry. Captain McCook received his promotion to brigadier general on September 3, 1861, and has been in command of a division in Kentucky since early October. He will lead that division in the Army of the Ohio under General Don Carlos Buell in the forthcoming campaign against Nashville, Tennessee. Captain Brooks received his promotion to brigadier general on September 28, 1861. He commands a brigade of Vermont regiments in the Army of the Potomac. (Wash Star 2/4/62 2:2; Cullum)

February 5, 1862

President and Mrs. Abraham Lincoln host a reception at the White House that begins at 9:00 pm. The event attracts a large gathering of the political and military leaders of Washington. The supper is provided by the celebrated caterer, Maillard of New York, and described by the reporter of the Washington Star as "the most superb affair of the kind ever seen here." One of the serving tables is occupied by a centerpiece that consists of a reproduction of Fort Pickens sculpted in sugar. the fort is 'manned' by deliciously prepared birds and similar "chicken fixins." (Wash Star 1/6/62 2:1)

February 6, 1862

Surgeon Charles S. Tripler, Medical Director of the Army of the Potomac, submits a report regarding the health of the various divisions and independent brigades surrounding Washington City. The brigade of Regular infantry under Brigadier General George Sykes has 136 soldiers reported as sick out of a total command of 2,495. This 5.45 percent ratio compares favorably to other units in the Army of the Potomac. According to Doctor Tripler, the sick report of the Regular troops has been seriously increased by the large number of cases of venereal disease being reported. Some of these are existing cases that were brought from California by the Fourth and Sixth Infantries, two regiments that served for many years on the

west coast and brought their sick soldiers to the east. Other cases have been contracted in Washington and indicate that the members of the Provost Guard have been taking advantage of the illicit pleasures available in the city.

When the battalion of the Third Infantry leaves Washington next month for field duty, 31 enlisted men will be left behind as 'absent sick'. Another 15 enlisted men will be present with the battalion, but will be unavailable for duty because of sickness, out of a total force of 449 enlisted men. The monthly return of the regiment usually indicates that one or two soldiers are discharged for disability each month. Most recently, Privates James Turner and Lawson McGerry of Company B have been discharged by reason of surgeon's certificate of disability. (OR I 5:713&717; Regt Return)

February 8, 1862

In an attempt to return Companies F and I of the Third Infantry to active service with the battalion of the regiment in Washington City, 82 enlisted men are transferred to the companies from Company A of the regiment, Companies G and K of the First Infantry, and the General Recruiting Service. The five companies were among the units captured in Texas in April and May 1861 and are being reorganized at Fort Columbus, New York Harbor. In consequence of recruits for the Regular Army coming in so slowly, the transfer of all available men at the General Recruiting Depot still leaves Companies F and I under strength.

Only officers and noncommissioned officers remain with the three depleted companies. In the case of Company A, this means one officer, one sergeant, and one corporal present for duty. Without a company to command, the officer, Second Lieutenant George Butler is assigned to duty with the Recruiting Service. Recruiting proceeds so badly, however, that one of the recruiting offices in New York City is forced to close. The remaining offices are described as not doing any business.

February 9, 1862

At 1:00 a.m., a detachment of the City Guard under the personal command of Brigadier General George Sykes arrests Brigadier General Charles P. Stone at his residence in Washington City. General Stone was in command of the Union force defeated at the Battle of Ball's Bluff near Leesburg, Virginia, on October 21, 1861. A conservative Democrat, General Stone had earlier run afoul of some Congressmen by returning fugitive slaves to their masters. His subsequent defeat at Ball's Bluff, in which a member of Congress was killed, is portrayed by some in the Administration and Congress as evidence of treason. The order for his arrest is issued on January 28th by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. On February 8th, Major General George McClellan instructs Provost Marshal Andrew Porter to execute the order and the task is delegated to General Sykes.

General Stone is placed in close confinement under guard in the quarters of the officers of the provost marshal's guard. In Special Special Order No. 14, Provost Marshal Porter selects First Lieutenant Andrew Sheridan of Company H to escort General Stone to New York City for imprisonment in Fort Lafayette. Lieutenant Sheridan is accompanied by a detail of one sergeant, one corporal, and six enlisted men selected from the regiment. The transfer is made this very night.

Upon his arrest, General Stone asked General Sykes the reason for the order, but General Sykes responded that he was completely ignorant of it. General Sykes consents to deliver a letter from General Stone to the Adjutant General's Office of the Army of the Potomac asking for a copy of the charges that are the basis for the arrest and an opportunity to promptly respond to them. He is given neither. Instead, General Stone is confined 189 days until August

16, 1862, when he is released from arrest without explanation. He remains completely ignorant of the official reasons for his arrest. (O.R.(I) 5:341-346; RG393, I:E-4052)

February 13, 1862

The 16-member regimental band is reorganized. First Principal Musician Philip Reuter and Second Principal Musician William Shimoneck are reduced to privates in the band. A new position of Drum Major is created and Musician Henry Zell of Company D is appointed to fill the position. Drum Major Zell has considerable musical experience having been a drummer in the Army since 1847. He will begin his fourth tour of duty, a three-year enlistment, on May 25th, but illness will result in his discharge in December. While an excellent drummer, he is apparently less accomplished as conductor of the band, and Private Edward Kirwan of the band is appointed as Band Leader on March 5th. (Muster roll F, S, & B)

February 13, 1862

Companies F and I leave Camp McClellan at Fort Columbus on Governors Island in New York Harbor enroute for Washington City. The two companies consist of 127 enlisted men who are mostly new recruits. The New York Times reports, however, that "these companies are almost perfect in all the branches of light infantry drill and appear more like veterans than young soldiers." Moreover, most of the noncommissioned officers are old soldiers and the companies are commanded by two veterans of frontier service: Captain Thomas W. Walker of Company I, who was chiefly responsible for their instruction, and Captain John D. Wilkins of Company F. Captain Wilkins has been on recruiting duty in Albany, New York, for his company and was called in specially to take command of his company and go into active service.

Before the war, John D. Wilkins, then a First Lieutenant with the Third Infantry, had served for more than four years as regimental adjutant until his resignation on May 6, 1860, to accept an assignment with the General Recruiting Service. He had also served as Acting Assistant Adjutant General of the Department of New Mexico between September 18, 1858, and May 6, 1860. Upon his departure from Sante Fe, the commander of the department expressed his thanks for the "zeal and ability" with which Wilkins had performed his duties. The commander of the Third Infantry was equally complimentary, taking "pleasure in acknowledging the very able and satisfactory manner in which he has performed all his duties". Wilkins was the son of a former Army captain and his grandfathers had been Mayor of Pittsburg and Quartermaster General of the Army. He entered the Military Academy at the age of 20 and was one of the graduates of the famous West Point Class of 1846. This class would produce 10 Confederate generals and 12 Union generals, including General McClellan. Given Captain Wilkin's service in the Mexican War, administrative experience on the frontier, and powerful classmates and family connections, he probably expected something more significant than service as a line officer. However, he would exercise no command higher than acting commander of the Third Infantry. In letters written to his wife throughout 1862, Captain Wilkins will exhibit an increasing bitterness to his unfortunate lot and toward fellow officers obtaining general-officer rank. (NYTimes 2/14/61 8:3; AGO Letters Rec'd 1860 M567, #16B; Letters Sent Dept. NM, #92, page 422, Asso, of Grads, USMA, annual report 1901, page 32; Waugh x)

February 14, 1862

Companies F and I arrive in Washington City and join the battalion of the Third Infantry encamped in Franklin Square near the White House. In anticipation of imminent field service, the two companies were not allowed to bring laundresses with them from Governors Island. In fact, the New York Times reports that all wives of Regulars now in the field are being quietly withdrawn to Washington or elsewhere and will receive certificates entitling them to draw rations on the Commissary. "This looks as if the regulars have their work cut out for them."

There are other indications that the Regular infantry will soon take the field. The fancy dress uniforms of the Regular enlisted men, consisting of nine-button frock coat, brass shoulder scales, and feathered top hat, are packed in cases and turned over to the quartermaster department for safe keeping. The men will instead wear a four-button short coat and a French-style military cap. The coat, called a sack coat in recognition of its complete lack of stylishness, is dark blue and will be worn by the majority of the Union Army.

The enlisted men are also issued shelter halves, which is simply a piece of canvas six feet by five feet with buttons and buttonholes along the edges so that two or more pieces can be joined together to form a tarp or A-shaped tent. The end product is so low to the ground that a soldier must enter on his hands and knees and sitting in one is impossible except for the most nimble soldiers. The shelter half comes with side and ridge poles of light wood designed telescope in convenient lengths and several tent pins. Of course all this material had to be strapped to the soldier's knapsack and carried. These tents are 'affectionately' referred to as dog or pup tents by the troops. The officers are more fortunate and receive a collection of wall-tents and A-tents, which are large enough to actually permit a person of moderate height to stand upright in one. Even senior line officers are required to double-up, and Captain John Wilkins of Company F will share a tent with First Lieutenant Joseph A. McCool. Transportation is also provided for the officers tents. (Bat'n and Reg't Returns; NYTimes 2/14/61 8:3; Meyers 194-95; Wilkins 6/22/62)

February 16, 1862

Fort Donelson, Tennessee, surrenders to Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant. Commanding the Second Division of the victorious troops is Colonel (Brigadier General Volunteers) Charles Ferguson Smith of the Third Infantry who achieved the colonelcy of the regiment upon Colonel Benjamin Bonneville's retirement in September 1861. General Smith has been in the Army since July 1, 1820, when he entered the United States Military Academy. After his graduation in 1825, he joined the Second Artillery and most of his service has been with that branch. He served as Commandant of the Military Academy when his now superior officer, Grant, was a lowly cadet there. Smith received brevet promotions of major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel for his gallant and meritorious conduct during the Mexican War. Upon the formation of the Tenth Infantry in 1855, he became its lieutenant colonel.

Colonel Smith did not join the Third Infantry in the field upon his promotion in September 1861. Instead, as a brigadier general of volunteers, he assumed command of the District of Western Kentucky, headquarters Paducah, which became the staging ground for the first offensive attacks against Tennessee. General Smith played an important role in the capture of Fort Donelson, and General Grant acknowledged "that he owed his success at Donelson emphatically to him." Smith's Division occupied the left of the Union line. On February 15th, the Confederates attacked the Union right in an attempt to escape from the besieged fort. Recognizing the enemy's intention, General Grant ordered General Smith to immediately attack the fortifications in his front and to carry the position at all hazards. According to one reporter on the scene, "It was a formidable undertaking, which, under a less brave and skillful commander than General Smith, might have proved a disastrous failure." Fortunately, it was a magnificent success.

General Smith led the attacking force in person upon his horse, the General, with his hat on the point of his sword. Threading their way through the abatis, the troops reformed and "rushed after their gallant chief into the very jaws of death. Upward, through the smoke of battle, they climbed till the perilous goal was reached; a lodgement was made in the enemy's works, the defenders fled, the day was won, and the battle ended with unconditional and immediate surrender." (Reb.Rec. vol 4; Cullum 1:#410)

February 22, 1862

Since September 23, 1861, the playing at cards among the garrison of Fort Pickens, Florida, has been prohibited by Post Order No. 163. Of course, the issuance of the order did not stop this traditional leisure-time activity for enlisted men, it only required a little more circumspection on the part of the participants in a game. Between 8:30 p.m. and midnight, Sergeant Hugh Massey of Company E breaks up one of these illegal gatherings of card players. Usually, the violators would be taken to the Guardhouse for several days of confinement to count their winnings or brood over their losses. This time, however, one of the participants, Private James McCollum of Company C, refuses to comply with Sergeant Massey's order. Private McCollum emphasizes his refusal by "seizing the said Sergeant Massey by the neck tie or thereabouts."

Such conduct could not be dealt with in the usual manner of confinement and minor corporeal punishment. Colonel Harvey Brown orders a General Court Martial to be convened to try Private McCollum on charges of disobedience of orders for violating the post order against card playing and for ignoring Sergeant Massey and mutinous conduct for assaulting the sergeant. At his trial on March 7th, Private McCollum pleads guilty to the charges. He gives no explanation for his rash actions, but simply asks the court to show mercy as this is his first offense. He also requests Sergeant John Morris of Company C to speak to the Court on his behalf. Private McCollum was one of the 27 recruits who joined Company C in December 1860 while the company was stationed at Ringgold Barracks, Texas. He has stayed with the company since then, which is more than can be said for half of his fellow recruits, and Sergeant Morris testifies that his character has been very good.

The Court confirms the guilty plea. Whether they showed mercy or not is left to the judgment of the reader. Private McCollum is sentenced to forfeit \$10.00 per month of his monthly pay for four months and to be confined at hard labor in charge of the Guard for one month wearing a 24 pound ball attached by a chain to his left leg. (GCM II-771)

Febraury 22, 1862

The day appointed by President Abraham Lincoln for the forward movement of all of the land and sea forces of the United States passes without incident in Washington City. The Regular soldiers of the City Guard commemorate the day by flying the flag and lighting candles in the windows of their quarters. (Meyers 194)

February 27, 1862

Former Captain (Brevet Lieutenant Colonel) Daniel T. Chandler of Company I is retired from active duty upon his own application as an officer who is "incapacitated from long and faithful service and the diseases and injuries incident thereto." Chandler was among the staff officers captured in San Antonio, Texas, in April 1861. He was only exchanged and released from his parole late last month for Colonel J.A.J. Bradford of the North Carolina Volunteers who was captured in August 1861 at the fall of the Confederate forts at the entrance to Hatteras Inlet, North Carolina.

February 28, 1862

Tomorrow is pay day for Government employees in Washington City, and the Washington Star reports that "the Provost Guard design paying their attention to the gaming houses of the city and their frequenters of high and low degrees." Provost Marshall Andrew Porter has ordered the Guard to summarily close every gaming house discovered and seize everyone found playing in them and all paraphernalia of their different games.