

## 150 Years Ago in the Third Infantry

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### August 1862

#### August 1, 1862

First Sergeant David Grier of Company E, who was wounded in the Battle of Gaines Mill and recommended by Captain Thomas Walker as worthy of being promoted to a commissioned officer on account of his abilities, past good conduct, and excellent bearing in that battle, deserts from the camp of the Third Infantry at Harrison's Landing. He is one of seven soldiers to desert from the regiment during its stay at Harrison's Landing. It is curious why such a high-ranking and respected noncommissioned officer would desert. Grier first enlisted in the Army on July 5, 1855, in Philadelphia, and reenlisted on May 5, 1860, while stationed at Fort Defiance, New Mexico Territory. He was promoted to sergeant on November 20, 1856, and first sergeant on November 20, 1860. His wife was one of the laundresses for the regiment.

It is equally confusing where any of the seven deserters thought they could go from Harrison's Landing deep in rebel territory. Perhaps they were able to stow away on one of the supply ships in the James River. In a letter written on July 9, a couple of days after 5 soldiers of the regiment deserted, Captain John Wilkins referred to the fact that "some officers and men have gone home without permission and I expect will suffer for it." So apparently, there were ways of leaving the place. (Regt Return; Muster rolls; Wilkins 7/9/62)

#### August 4, 1862

Captain Wilkins, commanding the Third Infantry, is ordered to cross the James River with his regiment to conduct a reconnaissance beyond Coggins Point. The crossing is delayed when the steamboats run aground, but by 5 p.m. Captain Wilkins and his force relieve Colonel Daniel Sickles. Wilkins deploys pickets along the line previously occupied by Sickles' force. After nightfall, on Sickles' recommendation, Wilkins relieves his first line of pickets with a new line "posted in rear of the swamp and in front of the battery". A detachment of cavalry under a Colonel Childs and Lieutenant Elder's battery are attached to Captain Wilkins' force. Wilkins writes to his wife later that he had a command of more than 500 men. In consultation with Colonel Childs, "we determined the next morning to occupy all the open ground to our front, which was accordingly done at daybreak." (OR I 11(2):949; Wilkins 8/62; Meyers 260-61)

#### August 5, 1862

About 8 a.m., Captain John Wilkins, commanding the Third Infantry and a force of cavalry and artillery on the south side of the James River, is ordered "to find out the position of the enemy, and on the arrival of General Butterfield to attack the enemy with my whole force". The enemy is supposed to be located at Sycamore Church, but an advance of Colonel Child's cavalry goes more than a mile past the church and finds only a few enemy pickets. From a captured picket, Captain Wilkins learns that the enemy pickets have withdrawn to another church, known as the Brick Church. The cavalry also brings back an old Black man, who shows Wilkins a direct route to the Brick Church. A force of five enemy regiments are reported to be there. During the interview with the the prisoner and contraband, General Butterfield arrives to assume command. He directs Wilkins to recall his pickets and to advance on the Brick Church. Three mounted pickets of the enemy are all that are found there. They fire a single shot and retire, unsuccessfully pursued by the cavalry for about a mile. From an examination of the ground and a letter found at the church, Captain Wilkins is confident there is no enemy within four miles and the pickets are probably from a force located in Petersburg.

It is now late afternoon. The day has been "excessively hot", and "many men sank under it". The assistant surgeon with the command reports 20 cases of sunstroke. Captain Wilkins concludes it is time to retire. "After the usual delay at the landing", the Third Infantry is back in its camp at Harrison's Landing at 8:30. Writing an initial report upon his arrival at camp, Captain Wilkins admits that he too is suffering greatly from the heat and that a fuller report will follow the next morning "provided I am well". (OR I 11(2):949; Wilkins 8/62)

### **August 7, 1862**

First Lieutenant Charles Hazlett of the Fifth Artillery submits a request to the Adjutant General of the Army of the Potomac seeking the assignment of First Lieutenant John Benson Williams of the Third Infantry to temporary duty with Battery D of the Fifth Artillery. Lieutenant Hazlett was a West Point classmate of Williams. Hazlett commands the battery and is one of only two officers currently present with the battery, but he notes in his application that it is made at the request of Lieutenant Williams. Given his trial and conviction for misconduct during the Battle of Gaines Mill, it is not surprising that Lieutenant Williams would prefer new surroundings. General George Sykes, commanding the Second Division, quickly puts an end to the matter: "Lt Williams is, and has been, in command of his company for many months. His services there are much more needed they they can be with any battery in a subordinate position." (E1101 RG 391)

### **August 8, 1862**

After more than a month of inactivity, rumors abound at Harrison's Landing regarding the future of the Army of the Potomac. One thing is certain, as Captain John Wilkins points out in a letter to his wife: "We are going somewhere shortly - all the preparations are made, and we can move at a moments notice." Captain Wilkin's prediction is that the Army of the Potomac is "going to bother them at Richmond a little", as evidenced by the return of General Hooker's division to Malvern Hill, while General John Pope, recently brought to Washington from the Western theater, goes after the elusive Stonewall Jackson. Instead, the President decides to terminate the encampment on the James River and unite General McClellan's Army with the Army of General Pope.

In expectation of soon marching, Wilkins rejects his wife's entreaties to send him clothing and supplies to replace his belongings burnt up at Camp Lovell on the eve of the Battle of Gaines Mill. Wilkins has managed to "procure a pair of blankets and some few other necessaries and I manage to get along as well as my neighbors". "If I had all the comforts, I couldn't carry them... and anything you would send would be lost." Enlisted men are drawing the same conclusions. (Wilkins 7/28/62; Meyers 262-63)

### **August 14, 1862**

The Fifth Army Corps is the first of the corps of the Army of the Potomac to leave Harrison's Landing for Newport News. Sykes' division receives orders in the afternoon to strike tents and prepare to march. The first regiments depart about 6 p.m. The troops march through the night, resting only about two hours about midnight. (Reg't Return; Meyers 262)

### **August 15, 1862**

Sykes' division reaches the Chickahominy River, crossing to the north side of that river for the first time since the battle of Gaines Mill a month and a half earlier. The pontoon bridge is about 1000 feet long. Shortly after crossing, the division bivouac for the remainder of the day and that night. (Meyers 262)

**August 18, 1862**

After passing through Williamsburg and Yorktown, Sykes' division reaches Newport News. The soldiers are given the opportunity to clean up after five days of hot and dusty marching with salt water bathing in the James River. (Reg't Return; Meyers 262)

**August 20, 1862**

The Third Infantry and other units of Sykes' division board the *Elm City* for Aquia Creek on the Potomac River. Augustus Meyers of the Second Infantry expands on the dry regimental movements report by noting that steamboat ride was the "usual overcrowded and uncomfortable experience". (Reg't Return; Meyers 263)

**August 21, 1862**

The *Elm City* arrives at Aquia Creek and the soldiers of the Third Infantry and other troops onboard are transferred to shore via tugboat. There is a railroad to Fredericksburg, about 20 miles away, and the men are "tumbled into empty freight cars and upon platform cars and taken to Falmouth Station." The troops disembark and bivouac. The remainder of the division arrives the next day, slowed by delays disembarking at Aquia Creek. The other corps of the Army of the Potomac are delivered to Alexandria, thereby reducing the distance they'll need to march to join General Pope's Army. (Reg't Return; Meyers 263)

**August 23, 1862**

The men of General Sykes' division are issued rations and begin to march along the Rappahannock River toward the line of the Orange and Alexandria railroad. Augustus Meyers of the Second Infantry recalled that the march along the railroad through Bealton, Warrenton Junction, Catlett's Station, and Bristoe Station was a "severe one": "Parts of the country seemed to be destitute of water, which caused us great suffering, and many were overcome and dropped by the wayside." Huge clouds of dust are raised above the marching columns, which cause great discomfort to the soldiers and of course betray the movements of both armies. (Reg't Return; Meyers 263)

**August 28, 1862**

While passing Bristoe Station, where sections of the railroad track had been torn up by Stonewall Jackson's troops days earlier, the men of Sykes' division hear cannonading. This is Stonewall Jackson announcing his presence near last year's battlefield outside Manassas. (Meyers 263)

**August 29, 1862**

Resuming the march at daybreak, Sykes' division and the rest of the Fifth Corps passes through Manassas Junction early in the morning. Here they witness the "ruins of locomotives, cars, and immense quantities of rations and military stores totally destroyed by fire a few days before". The soldiers could use some of those supplies now. The last issue of rations was at Warrenton Junction, and the men are reduced to half-rations. During the night, they'll receive "a small allowance of hard-tack and nothing else".

Shortly after passing Manassas, the Fifth Corps is ordered to about-face since they have in fact passed the enemy's position at Groveton. They take the Warrenton Pike toward Gainesville, but before reaching that place, encounter the the first of Confederate General Longstreet's troops arriving to reinforce Jackson. General Pope will refuse to believe that Longstreet is also in the vicinity, which will cause great difficulty for General Fitz John Porter of the Fifth Corps after the battle and even greater difficulty for thousands of Union troops during the battle. Sykes' division takes up a position near Bethlehem Church and masses as a reserve in support of the First Division of the Fifth Corps. There was much firing between the skirmishers of the First Division and Longstreet's troops, and "some movements as though we were forming for

an attack, with the object of preventing Longstreet from sending reinforcements to Jackson at Groveton, but nothing came of it and we remained in our position until daybreak, August thirtieth."

Private Peter Brown of Company I deserts while the Third Infantry is in position. The regimental return specifically notes that Private Brown deserted "while the action was going on, the Regiment momentarily expecting to be engaged." (Reg't Return; Meyers 263-64)

### **August 30, 1862 - The Battle of Second Bull Run**

*Report of Captain John D. Wilkins, Commanding Third U.S. Infantry*

I have the honor to report that on the 30th of August this regiment arrived on the old battle-field of Bull Run at about 7 o'clock a.m. A short time after the brigade was formed in line of battle in front of the Dogan house, and the regiment ordered forward as skirmishers, with orders to occupy the crest of the hill in our front, our left resting on the Alexandria and Warrenton turnpike. We remained in this position about three hours, when I received orders to advance the line, which was promptly done. To effect this it was necessary to drive the enemy from some houses in front of our left. This was gallantly done by three companies, under the command of Lieutenant Sheridan, with loss of 2 men killed and 3 wounded.

Our line of skirmishers then connected with those of the Pennsylvania Reserves (the Bucktails) on our left and General Butterfield's on our right. At about 4.30 p. m. the attack was made by our troops on the right, and a short time after a movement was observed on our left among the skirmishers of the Pennsylvania Reserves, which ended in their retiring entirely from their position. This was immediately reported to General Sykes, who directed me to occupy the same ground with my skirmishers, which was accordingly done. The skirmishers of the Third Infantry then occupied all the open ground in front, extending from wood to wood.

The left of our line of skirmishers was hotly pressed at this time, but the line was held until the movement on our right commenced. I then assembled the skirmishers on the right of the turnpike and retired by it, having directed the skirmishers on the left of it to join me. This they were unable to do, but under Lieutenant Sheridan they assembled on Colonel Warren's brigade, and were with them in the fierce engagement which they had on the left. With all the men of my regiment I could get together I joined the brigade, which I found formed in front of the Henry and Robinson houses. Shortly after we were ordered forward to engage the enemy, who were pressing our left. We had a short and close conflict at this point, and were finally forced to retire, which we did in good order. Subsequently we moved to Centreville, arriving at 1 o'clock in the night.

Lieutenant Sheridan's conduct came under my own observation, and was all that could be desired. He mentions with praise the conduct of Lieutenants Whitney and Eckert, the former wounded and the latter contused. Lieutenant Penrose was active and energetic. Sergeant Torpy, of Company H, with 10 men of that company, held one of the houses occupied by us against a vastly superior force, and only retired when half his men were wounded and the house surrounded. He was subsequently wounded and left on the field. Sergt. Maj. August Kaiser, First Sergrts. Stanley Mourton, of Company H; Hopkins, of Company I; **Litzinger, of Company K**; Smith, of Company B; Hessian, of Company G; Coady, of Company F; Schafer, of Company E; Morris, of Company C; Hanley, of Company D, and Sergeants Flynn, Ackland, and Scully, of the regiment, are mentioned as having been distinguished for coolness and bravery during the entire contest. Lieutenant Devoe, adjutant of the regiment, rendered me important service during the action, and behaved with the same indifference to danger which has distinguished him on former occasions. Our entire loss was 3 killed, 15 wounded, and 25 missing, many of whom were no doubt killed.

The following officers were present in the action: Capt. John D. Wilkins, commanding regiment; Capt. Thomas W. Walker, acting field officer; Capt. F. A. Davies, Sixteenth Infantry, commanding Company D, Third Infantry; Acting Assistant Surgeon Hall, Second Lieut. Frederick Devoe, adjutant of the regiment; First Lieut. A. Sheridan, commanding Company H; First Lieut. William H. Penrose, commanding Company B; First Lieut. D. Parker, commanding Company E; First Lieut. John B. Williams, commanding Company G; First Lieut. John H. Page, commanding Company I; First Lieut. George B. Eckert, commanding Company C, contused; Second Lieut. Henry Asbury, commanding Company F; Second Lieut. John Whitney, commanding Company K, wounded; Second Lieut. I. A. Helm.