

Private Ebenezer Westfall Papers

35th Illinois Volunteer Regiment, Company A

Born 1838

[image-Private Ebenezer Westfall, 35th Illinois Volunteer Regiment]

Trial Information

He was examined by a Justice of the Peace who fully committed him for trial, principal witnesses against him were his near relatives testifying to the above facts. [the above part of this is missing] There was also proof by the prints in the snow.

Vandever, Westfall's lawyer, succeeded in continuing the case one or two terms, and finally obtained a change of venue to Shelby County. Shelby County is immediately to the east of Christian County.

The evidence was so conclusive in the case that it is presumed that the ultimate punishment would have been meted. Witnesses named for the trial were Daniel Missenhammer, Nancy Missenhammer, and Elizabeth Brannon. Bonded witnesses on behalf of the people included Job B. Davis, Joseph Painter, John D. A. Bond, William Goodrich, Dr. E. T. Chapman, John Bowman, Milton Pike, John Hinton, John Durban, W. B. Keller, John Goode, Matthew Durbin and Joshua Bowman.

While imprisoned in the Christian County Jail at Taylorville, using a case knife, Westfall succeeded in cutting his way out of the oaken walled facility. He escaped to the brush and an immediate search was made for him. No trace of him was found and he was never heard of after. It was learned some time later that his wife had secreted food and other provisions to him for a week or two while in hiding within the county.

BATTLE OF STONES RIVER

December 30, 1862 – January 3, 1863

Early in 1861, Rebel forces had fired on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor (South Carolina) initiating armed hostilities between the Union and Confederate states. That summer, Union forces were embarrassed just outside Washington D.C. at the first Battle of Bull Run. Emotions were running high throughout the country as sides in the issues were firmly taken. Generally, ethnic, social and economic alignments tended to place those in northern states on one side, those in southern states on the other. The division was often not so pure in any locality.

Having been orphaned only four or five years earlier, the children of Arnold and Marilla (Barnes) Westfall were living in foster homes. The older two sons, Ebenezer and William answered the call of recruiters, joining the Union forces. Daniel Alonzo, their younger brother, could not, he was too young.

Ebenezer, born in 1838, joined the Thirty-Fifth Volunteer Infantry Regiment of Illinois. A cousin, William Riley King, a neighbor, James E. Galloway and a friend, Isaac McBroom joined with him. Ebenezer, Isaac and Riley were assigned to Company A, Galloway was assigned to Company B. Assembly of the new regiment was at Decatur, Illinois. On the 4th of August, 1861 the new army started south. As with many grand and glorious starts, the young men, most of whom had never been outside of their native county, became infected with "Soldier's Complaint", intestinal distress due to unusual foods and water. The recruiter's promises preached with the aid of a brass band extoling exciting adventure serving The Cause proved for the first few weeks to be somewhat elusive. Ebenezer's complaint laid him up in Marine Hospital at St. Louis for a time.

By mid-September the regiment had mostly survived its first "battle", it was transported by railroad to Jefferson City, Missouri. From there, mostly by marching, the 750 or more men proceeded to Otterville on the 25th, to Sedelia by October 15th and to Springfield on the 26th. During most of November and December the Thirty-Fifth Illinois made its presence known by various marches into Wilson's Creek, Rolla and other places of Phelps County in south-western Missouri.

In late January of 1862 Isaac, Riley and James were to experience the first firing of weapons not as target practice or foraging for fresh rabbit and squirrel meat. The Rebel Army of General Price was retreating from the area into Northern Arkansas, Illinois 35th (and others) in hot pursuit.

The chase lasted for about 230 miles and several weeks finally pausing at a place called Pea Ridge in Arkansas. General Price decided it was here to turn and take the offensive with his Missouri men against troops of Illinois and Iowa.

On the seventh of March, from about ten in the morning until four in the afternoon, gunfire like continuous thunder and thick smoke stinging their nostrils and blurring their vision gave Isaac, Riley and James veteran soldier status. They heard the screams of wounded, shouts of sergeants and officers and cries of horses in an absolute nightmare. When the day had ended their measured success in defending their positions had cost 15 lives, 45 men wounded and 55 known to have been taken prisoner by the Rebels. None had previously envisioned wounded and dying men like so many hogs on butchering day.

Left in hastily dug graves were friends of less than a year:

Robert Bullock
Edward Cooper

Samuel Devall
Jacob Immel
George Morrison
Thomas Campbell
John Cox
Jacob Durham
William Jackson
John Porter
Richard Canada
John Cross
John Durham
James Meak
Joseph Williams

Ebenezer missed the action, he had been sick since November and stayed behind at Rolla. His illness was not officially diagnosed but speculation is that his original intestinal distress was more serious than that of the other boys. Water and foods containing unaccustomed bacteria can take some time for one's immune system to reconcile with. He rejoined his buddies in early May.

They had again been subjected to experiences not fully explained by that recruiter last summer. He had failed to mention that any wound from a fifty caliber [sic] ball would shatter bone, amputations were done without anesthesia, sanitation facility and care for wounded were virtually zero and If infection didn't get you, pneumonia would.

Those former neighbor pals and new friends left in unmarked graves were all too real to these survivors. They continued their service with a wary eye for Rebs. [sic] Rations were hard tack, a bread product made up by contractors to the Army who looked to commercial success rather than nutrition. The hard tack was sometimes weevil infested due to slow and inefficient distribution with little protection from the elements. Soldiers found that roasting it on a stick over a fire would drive the pests out. Salt pork in the ration package had to be soaked or boiled in order to remove enough salt to taste the meat. Fresh beef came about once a week from the small herd of animals following the regiment. Roasted coffee beans in each soldier's ration were ground by hammering them with a rifle butt against a rock. The woolen blanket issued gave little protection from rains and, when wet, was slow to dry out especially when rolled up.

Only essential items were carried by each soldier. Marching was difficult enough without unnecessary weight. A knapsack containing a change of clothing and a blanket hung on their backs with straps. Tin cup and pan with canteen were hung onto the knapsack. A haversack draped over the hip contained a day's rations (twelve ounces of salt pork and hard tack) plus some sugar and coffee. A cartridge case with forty rounds hung below the haversack. Finally, a bayonet in a scabbard rounded out the material strapped on. A rifle of 68 caliber seldom left his hands.

The rest of 1862 saw the boys through a lot of southern Missouri and into Tennessee and Mississippi. Several contacts with the Rebels were made but no serious losses were encountered like those at Pea Ridge. The fall and early winter, according to weather notes in military records, began early and were especially cold and wet. By Christmas time the Thirty-Fifth Illinois was at Nashville, the Rebels were near the town of Murfreesboro 31 miles to the southeast.

At daybreak of the 26th Rosecrans' Army headed southeast. The ground between Nashville and Murfreesboro became a quagmire as thousands of Yanks proceeded down the pike and railroad cut. Enemy forces had been scouted and battle lines began to form by the 29th of December just west of Murfreesboro. What a way to celebrate the new year. Freezing rain persisted, surely no battle of consequence could take place. Shots were exchanged for two days with occasional close calls. Every near hit just caused Ebenezer, James, Isaac and Riley to stay closer to the cold, wet ground or to keep a tree between themselves and Johnny Reb.

At daylight on Wednesday the 31st Rebel forces (26th and 39th Alabama Regiments) charged the positions of Woodruff's third brigade. Sister regiments, Eighty-First Indiana and Twenty-Fifth Illinois were forced to retreat by an overwhelming force of men, gunfire and artillery. This appeared to be like Pea Ridge except rank was never broken then. Thirty-Fifth held its position allowing the first two regiments to reload and reform. The rebels seemed to pause for a while, probably gathering wounded and prisoners.

The pause was only brief, a fresh force (Texas Ninth) joined them and a new charge was coming. This one looked pretty bad, more noise, smoke and that incessant yelling the rebels were famous for than had been seen in the hour before or what was said about Pea Ridge. Bullets was striking all around and men were getting hit, brave adventurers were afraid. A sudden jolt like a kick from a mule struck Ebenezer knocking him to the ground. He was hit. Intense pain and fear caused him to feel strangely dizzy and nauseas. He saw Sergeant Sam Bird of Company C and several others go down near him. Those not hit ran back into the cedars to the West and North.

Positions were completely over-run and now strangers with an unusual accent began gathering walking wounded. Ebenezer, Sam and six others were taken to an assembly area. They were now prisoners of war. This status would last for only a few hours. Captured wounded were exchanged (paroled) later in the day. Ebenezer and Sam were at least now back in friendly hands.

Their unit had suffered 45 men wounded not counting those captured. Twenty-one more were unaccounted for. Four hundred thirty-nine men began the day alive and healthy. One in five were out by the end of the day. Bodies of ten men and an officer of the Thirty-Fifth lay behind including:

William Mason
Jeremiah Payne
Sandusky Wright

Jacob Musser
Leonard Powell
Isaac Nelson
Curney Wicker

Rebel forces retreated after five days of fighting. Small consolation that 12,000 men of the Army of Tennessee were among the battle's casualties. Triumph of emotion over reason, roots of the war, had again put men of common heritage and destiny into mortal contact. One in four Confederate soldiers was killed or wounded, one in five for Union men. Total casualties of the Battle of Stones River (23,525) would be equal to about a half a twentieth century Super Bowl's attendance.

Cold rain, sleet and winds had weakened them. Stamina required to stay warm and awake was enough against meager cold rations of the last few months, healing was slow. Wounded mates of Regiment 35 including George Morrison (from Oconee, the one killed at Pea Ridge was from Catlin), Moses Buchanan, and James Chambers who all died in less than a week. John Simmons lasted about two weeks.

It appeared that Ebenezer and Sergeant Sam Bird would survive, two and a half weeks had elapsed since taking the hit. They were "hospitalized" in the home of a family named Harding less than a half mile of where they had been wounded.

Either infection began to spread or he contracted pneumonia, a high fever came on Ebenezer making him shake uncontrollably and hallucinate. He cried for his mother at times. In brief times of clear mind he made Sam promise to write to his sister Rachel if "anything happened". At seven-thirty on the evening of January 26 Ebenezer succumbed.

Sgt. Byrd wrote the letter, regained strength to rejoin his Thirty-Fifth and survived the war. Isaac wrote a similar letter to William, Ebenezer's brother. William Riley King, the cousin, died of intestinal distress at Chattanooga ten months later, James D. Galloway lasted only two months more. Isaac McBroom was mustered out September 27, 1864.

Ebenezer's body was buried in a coffin (unusual practice during the war) along with colleagues [sic] from Illinois' 35th and 25th regiments and Indiana's 81st. The graves on the north rise of the battle site were each marked with only a board. In two and a half years the boards became decayed or otherwise illegible. In mid-1865 a National Cemetery was created, all honored dead were reinterred. Over six thousand bodies of boys from Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Ohio and other places were reburied, names could be placed on less than half the new graves. Ebenezer Westfall's name is on the list of heroes [sic] buried there.

Letter
Murfreesboro, Tenn [sic]
Jan 29th 1863

Miss R. D. Westfall

In compliance with a promise I made to your brother Ebenezer, I write this letter to inform you of his death. He died at 7 1/2 P.M. of the 26th this month. I was with your brother from the time he was taken prisoner until his death, being wounded and taken myself. Our beds were side by side most of the time. His wound was not thought to be fatal, but the chills and fever set in on him and that with the wounds terminated his life. His comrades in Co. A came in and buried him next day. They procured a coffin which a great many do not get. I have no doubt but some of his friends have written to you before this time informing you of his death, but I felt as if I must write because I had promised him I would do so. In the forenoon of the day he died he called me to his bed side and told me if he should die here I must write to you and let you know it. I told him I would. He was delirious [sic] most of the day and would often mention his mother and sister. He was a good soldier on the Battle field and bore his suffering well.

I am very faithfully
your Obedient Serv't [sic]
Samuel W. Bird
35th Ills.

WILLIAM W. WESTFALL, Hospital Steward

First military record of the second son of Arnold and Marilla (Barnes) Westfall, is datelined St. Louis, Missouri, April 14, 1862. The Company Muster-in Roll shows Private William W. Westfall joining Captain Walter's Company of Mounted Rifles, Fifth Cavalry Regiment (Second Organization), Missouri Militia for the duration of the war.

We speculate that either bounty paid by Missouri was better than that of Illinois, or that the glamour of being a "Horse Soldier" (or both) was enticement for him to come to the neighbor state to the west and join in spirit with his older brother, Ebenezer in the war effort. He was 21 years old.

Physical description given for William Westfall differs for height and weight in the various documents but consistent are the notations "Light complexion, Blue eyes, Light (Auburn in one) Hair". These were characteristics prevailing in a man a few generations away from his full Dutch heritage.

Within three months he was serving as a Nurse at Marine Hospital at St. Louis. This was where his older brother had been laid up ten months before. A Nurse's duties were then far removed from today's image suggested by the same term. A Nurse would attend to all kinds of duties from menial tasks to assisting in surgery. Four out of five Nurses in this War were men. Medical service seemed to fit him well, he was to remain in it to the end. A few weeks later the unit moved to Waynesville, Missouri where another military hospital was located. This camp, in another century, would be named for Leonard Wood, a Rough Rider with Teddy Roosevelt and be the station of other Westfalls, cousins three or more generations removed.

Letters home seemed almost to complain that he had been in only one battle since joining. In October of 1862 he reported that a fight somewhere between Waynesville and Lebanon yielded 25 Rebels killed, several wounded and 15 prisoners and 30 horses captured.

Speaking of horses, records indicate that William may not have had the same horse for all of his time in service. He was usually paid for providing his own animal but, on occasion, he used a government mount. In one of his letter he said he "had the finest horse in these parts" (Colorado Territory).

In early 1863 he learned of his brother's death in [rest is missing]

Ebenezer Westfall Pedigree Chart

Ebenezer Westfall, born about 1838 in Martinsville, Morgan County, Indiana; There is no marriage date. He died January 26, 1838 in Murfreesboro, Rutherford County, Tennessee.

Marilla Barnes, spouse of Ebenezer Westfall. She was born February 10, 1811 and died about 1857 in Christian, Illinois.

Arnold Westfall, Ebenezer's father, was born January 21, 1810 in Bullitt, Kentucky. He was married on August 23, 1833 in Morgan, Indiana. He died about 1857 in Christian, Illinois.

Jacob Westfall, Ebenezer's paternal grandfather, was born about 1774 in West Virginia. He was married about 1800 in Bullitt, Kentucky. He died about 1845 in Morgan, Indiana.

Fanny (unknown last name), Ebenezer's paternal grandmother, was born about 1774. She died in Morgan, Indiana.

Daniel Westfall, Ebenezer's paternal great-grandfather, was born August 22, 1733 in Minisink, Orange County, New York. He was christened June 18, 1734 in Minisink, New York. He was married on May 15, 1761. He died on January 10, 1810 in Bullitt, Kentucky.

Hannah (unknown last name), married to Daniel Westfall, was born on August 24, 1744.

Johannes Westfall, Ebenezer's paternal great-great-grandfather, was born about 1711 in Minisink, Orange County, New York. He was christened on June 24, 1711 in Minisink, New York, He was married to Apolonia Kortrecht about 1732 and Margriet Quick, date unknown.

Apolonia Kortrecht, wife of Johannes Westfall, was born about 1712.