

**DELAWARE'S OWN**  
**Saga of the 144<sup>th</sup> Regiment, New York Volunteer Infantry**

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Transcribed for the Delaware website by Linda Ogborn

**Colonel Slidell** resigned to return to his own 16<sup>th</sup> United States Infantry. Lieutenant **Colonel James Lewis** became colonel of the 144<sup>th</sup> Regiment.

By Oct. 6 new recruits from the North brought the regiment up to its official capacity, 100 men to a company.

Among the recruits was the complete Walton Cornet Band. This band accompanied **General Littlefield** into Charleston when the Union flag was raised on Fort Sumter.

It played for the regiment for the last time participating in the July 4 victory celebration at Canandaigua on the way home at the end of the war.

**Chaplain Alexander H. Fullerton**, who had long been in ill health, now resigned. A member of Co. D he had been a student at Delaware Literary Institute, Franklin. He received his commission as chaplain of the 144<sup>th</sup> at Deposit at 21 years of age. He organized a regimental church, which he served for three years.

After one year's rest, he became a pastor at Masonville. He died while quite a young man, never having completely recovered from the rigors of war-time camp life.

November, 1864, marked the first time absentee votes could be sent home by men in the armed forces. The votes were mostly for Lincoln.

On Thanksgiving Day a special dinner and religious service were held. And a general review was watched by **General Potter**, newly in command of the brigade.

On Nov. 30, 1864, occurred the battle of Honey Hill. The 144<sup>th</sup> was lost at Boyd's Landing in the dense fog. It slept that night at Bolan's Church. Proceeding to Honey Hill the next morning, it found its way barred by the Rebels. Successfully repulsing the, the men reached the main forces at Honey Hill.

It was here that **Captain Penet** lost his right leg. The Confederates repulsed the attack. Co. B under **Captain Marvin** was in the front skirmishing. Enemy sharpshooters nearly annihilated them in an impenetrable jungle of woods. Four of the seven men of the color guard were killed. **Lieutenant James Mack, Sergeant Ed Miller and Corporal James K. Quick** of Co. F were killed.

The brigade was ordered to retire, the 144<sup>th</sup> Regiment being the last to leave. Of the 144<sup>th</sup>, ten men were killed, 52 wounded, some dying later, and two were reported missing, supposed killed.

**Sergeant James I. Clark**, Co. I, was wounded in the neck. He was unable to speak. Colored troops found and cared for him. He was reported dead. Later he did recover, after a long period of hospitalization.

**Sergeant Lafayette Axtell**, Co. A, Tompkins, was standing close to **Captain Penet** when he lost his leg. He assisted with the bandages. As he did so, he was wounded by a shot which entered his left cheek, passed through and out under the left ear. He was in the hospital four weeks before he returned to consciousness. Later he was discharged, but never recovered.

In 1865 at Elmira before the regiment was mustered out, a vote was taken as to whom the sword which **Judge Wheeler** had given at Hancock should be given. It was awarded to **Axtell** "for bravery and meritorious conduct at the battle of Honey Hill". The presentation was made at Barbourville.

On Dec. 6 the 144<sup>th</sup> boarded the steamer *Syliph*. It ran aground at Devaux's Neck, a point of land between the Coosawhatchie and Tulifinny rivers. Soon after they landed the men were in the thick of the fighting.

As colorbearer of the 5<sup>th</sup> George was hot dead, men of the 144<sup>th</sup> regiment captured the flag. (This is how the sentence was written in the original column)

After the war this flag was returned to the Southern regiment. **Honorable L. Coe Young**, Binghamton, escorted by a company of GAR Georgia, and presented it to the 5<sup>th</sup> Georgia regiment at its 22<sup>nd</sup> reunion. The date was August 22, 1885. Needless to say, the gesture was much appreciated by the Southern regiment.

But in Dec. 1864, the 144<sup>th</sup> was ordered to destroy a bridge over the Tulifinny. The mission was accomplished under rebel fire.

A skirmish was repulsed on Jan. 7. On Jan. 9 the regiment participated in a demonstration against the enemy. **Sergeant Cyrus C. Hotchkiss**, Colchester, was killed. **Colonel Lewis** conducted his burial on the field under fire.

The regiment was ordered to return to Hilton Head. Here it guarded a camp of 800 Rebel prisoners. A soldier of the 144<sup>th</sup> felt no spirit of retaliation for the horrors of Andersonville prison. The Union army gave its enforced wards many brotherly privileges.

On Jan. 15 Secretary of **Ward Edwin Stanton**, visited Hilton Head. The 144<sup>th</sup> did the honors.

In February the 144<sup>th</sup> was sent to examine the rebel fortifications on Edisto Island which had been captured. Later it was moved back to Folly Island, scene of former camp life.

On Feb. 9 the regiment made a reconnaissance to Cole's and Jones' Islands under the supervision of **Major General Schimmulfinig**. He came to the United States after Hungary's failure to secure freedom from Austria. Even then, the Hungarians were battling for the security of a government of their own.

At the assault of the Confederate fortifications on these islands **Captain Witter H. Johnston**, Sidney Co. F, lost a leg and **Lieutenant James Nutt**, Co. B. was killed. This engagement was considered the finest charge seen during the war according to military procedure.

Soon after the 144<sup>th</sup> was sent to Bull's Bay on the Savannah river. It landed under intense rebel fire. **Lieutenant Heimer**, Andes, was in command. A Confederate battery was captured.

The news that Charleston had been evacuated came. The rebel **General Hardee** fired its buildings. Some small boys set off an explosion of a gunpowder supply in a depot. Many lives were lost. Other buildings caught fire.

On their arrival the Union soldiers did what they could to check the fires.

Sunday morning, Feb. 20, the 144<sup>th</sup> lead the march into Mt. Pleasant, a suburb of Charleston. The United States flag flew over Fort Sumter and other forts on the harbor.

A colored woman gave one of the men of the 144<sup>th</sup> a United States flag which she had secreted.

"Bress de Lawd, bress de Lawd!" she cried with joy and tears mingling on her face.

This flag now reposes with the colors of the 144<sup>th</sup> regiment in the state archives at Albany.

The Union forces camped outside Charleston on Santee road. It is to the great honor of the 144<sup>th</sup> that it did not take part in the burning and plundering of the Southern countryside of which some of the fellow regiments were guilty.

Several of the companies were assigned to detached duty. Co. D (Franklin) and K (Colchester) were detailed to the Provost Marshal's Barracks, Co. E. (Andes, Bovina) to service at Fort Wells, Co. C, (Delhi) to dismantle a fort at the Bay Point island of St. Helena. **Lieutenant William B. Lewis**, Co. F (Hancock) was officer of the Port at Hilton Head. His duty was to examine vessels, grant passes, commandeer contraband articles. He even interviewed **Jefferson Davis**, defeated president of the Confederacy.

**Capt. St. John** and **Lieutenant Frank B. Hart** served on **General Ames'** staff. **Major Plaskett** (Hancock) had duty on the Examining Board at Hilton Head. **Lieutenant Heimer**, Andes, as the 'commodore' prepared maps of waterways around Hilton Head, commanded men on ships, acted as temporary

military governor of St. Helena Island, and governed the machine shops where 700 were employed. He was the first man from Delaware County to walk into captured Savannah. But he did not care for alligator meat for breakfast. It is said that some of the men did.

On Apr. 13, 1865 on the fourth anniversary of the lowering of the United States flag, the ceremony of returning that flag to the top of Fort Sumter occurred. Nearly all officers and many of the men of the 144<sup>th</sup> Delaware County regiment were present. The 144<sup>th</sup> band played for the service at the flag raising. **Henry Ward Beecher** gave the principal address at the impressive ceremonies.

Less than a week later the funeral guns proclaimed the death of **President Abraham Lincoln**. A shocked army quietly pursued its duties.

On July 9 **General Gordon's** Division had the advance in the first of the heavy foot marches. This was called the "blackberry raid" because the line of march led through fields where many of these bushes were prevalent. Many of the soldiers discarded their knapsacks, retaining only the most necessary equipment to ease their arduous trek across the countryside.

The first day's march brought the division to Fort Magruder, battleground of Williamsburg. They continued to advance to Twelve Mile Ordinary and Barhams. To the 144<sup>th</sup> fell the special assignment to break up gatherings of the rebels and observe the movements of the enemy.

Picket duty among the farmers was sort of a picnic. One company drove in the cows and did the milking. One soldier was a beekeeper. He brought in some honey. Others aided the farmer in getting the bees back.

Two young ladies, daughters of the plantation owner, sang songs to the soldiers with vim and verve expressing their disdain for the Union constabulary.

On June 28<sup>th</sup> the division returned to White House Landing. Here they found a large body of troops arriving. Later came the momentous news of **General Grant's** victory at Vicksburg on July 4, **General Meade's** at Gettysburg July 5<sup>th</sup>.

The division was moved back to Yorktown with Co. B. (Walton) taking down the telegraph lines on the way. The 144<sup>th</sup> embarked on the steamer *United States* and was returned to Soldier's Retreat at Washington. The very weary men now had an opportunity for a much needed rest.

Subsequent orders came for the regiment to join **General Meade's** forces at Frederick, Md.

### THE TRAIN WRECK

The train bearing the 142<sup>nd</sup> New York and the 40<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts running before the one containing the 144<sup>th</sup> did not flag the following train when it stopped at Moncey Junction for water.

The latter train ran into the rear of the stopped train. About 16 soldiers were hospitalized for injuries. **Captain Evans** and **Lieutenant Wilcox** of Co. A. (Deposit) were severely injured when jumping from a window of the officers' car. Most of the injured men were from Co. D. (Franklin).

Thus the movement of the troops was delayed. The 144<sup>th</sup> was then assigned to the 11<sup>th</sup> Army Corps under **Major General O.O. Howard** who had lost his right arm at Fair Oaks.

**General Phil Kearney** had lost his left arm in the Mexican War.

The story is told that when he was being carried to the rear **General Howard** called out to **General Kearney**, "General, we will have to buy our gloves together after this."

The army was concentrating at Berlin. The engineers were building a pontoon bridge over the Potomac. On July 19 the army moved into the Shenandoah Valley trying to overtake Lee's army.

The day was very warm. Some of the men were overcome with heat exhaustion.

On the first day they reached Leesburg, on the second Goose Creek. The rebels were close behind. They captured **Thomas Beaman** of Company F (Hancock).

July 23<sup>rd</sup> was the hardest day of the campaign. Large quantities of blackberries picked in the fields by the soldiers as they passed helped them to keep up their strength. They reached New Baltimore in the

night. Then on to Warrenton, then to Greenwich which they reached on August 1.

On that day Company G. (Middletown, Margaretville) had to escort a prisoner to his execution for desertion. He was the ringleader of a group which had deserted to the Rebel lines. His coffin was placed beside an open grave. When shot he fell forward into the open coffin.

**General Gordon** and his division were ordered to proceed to Alexandria. Here they embarked on the *John W. Warner* for Newport News where they were transferred to the steamer *John Rice*.

## GO TO CHARLESTON

On August 12 they entered the harbor of Charleston among the gunboats, ironclads, monitors, and mortar boats. The squadron was blockading Fort Sumter on the left and Fort Moultrie on the right which were held by Confederate forces.

The Union soldiers were stationed on Morris Island near the Confederate Fort Wagner.

After a short trip up Folly river, to Pawnee Landing on the west side of Folly Island, the new division made camp among the sand hills beside the ocean.

Here they found the ruins of one or two plantations. The island was only one mile in width. A barrel was sunk into the sand for water. The men could enjoy surf bathing in the ocean, too.

The 144<sup>th</sup> had been summoned to take part in the capture of Fort Wagner. On Aug. 15 the men participated in the change of guards at night. They were ferried across Lighthouse Inlet amid the thunder of cannon from the fort and bursting of shells.

The next day, Aug. 16, **Uriah J. Goodenough**, Co. H (Roxbury, Stamford), was killed by a fragment of shell. Sharpshooters concealed in trees added greatly to the men's danger.

Plans were made to bombard the Confederate forts by sea and land. The shelling began on Monday, Aug. 18, and continued through the week.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> a new gun battery was erected in a nearby swamp. The Delaware County regiment assisted in its construction. This "Swamp Angel", as it was called, was a formidable weapon. After the first shot the bells of Charleston rang, signaling the residents to evacuate from within its range immediately.

On the 36<sup>th</sup> charge, the breech pin was driven out, thus rendering the weapon harmless.

It is now preserved at Trenton, New Jersey, on a raised granite pedestal.

The 144<sup>th</sup> was on duty in this advance trench when the Confederates defeated the Union land and sea forces. The Rebels had come into possession of a copy of the Union signal code when they captured a Northern ship. Thus every move was revealed to them as the attacking forces advanced.

**William P. Fish** of Liberty, was killed in the siege of Fort Wagner on August 25<sup>th</sup>. He was struck by a fragment flung from a bursting cannon.

On August 20 the 144<sup>th</sup> returned to the camp on Folly Island. There was much sickness. Many deaths. Poor water. Sand drifting into the flour. Homesickness. Despondency.

**Francis Heimer**, Andes, Co. C, was so ill he was convinced that he would die. The sound of the Death March played by the band several times a day depressed everybody. The Massachusetts regiment used the same burial ground for its deceased comrades. If dug too deep, the grave filled with water.

## VOWED NOT TO DIE

**Lieutenant Heimer** decided he did not want to be buried in a water hole. He found a tree on higher ground. Two of his friends promised to bury him there.

Next day he found a Massachusetts man being buried there.

**Lieutenant Heimer** was so angry he vowed, "Now I shan't die, anyhow."

He dragged himself to Pawnee Landing where he knew there were oysters. Breaking open the shells with a door latch which he had found, he ate as many oysters as he could. Two days later he felt well enough to report for duty. He believed he would have died if the Massachusetts man had not stolen his grave. The men were sent to a convalescent camp which had been established at St. Augustine, Florida. Here in the dense groves of orange trees they became well.

The Union forces finally succeeded in capturing Fort Wagner. Seventy Confederate prisoners were taken. The rest had evacuated in the night. A new gun called the Avenging Angel was added to the captured battery. Its shells could reach Charleston and drive the inhabitants out of the city.

Sept. 26 marked the first anniversary of the "muster-in" of the 144<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Now there were many changes. Of the officers who started army life with the regiment, the three surgeons and **Chaplain Fullerton**, Franklin, were still serving. None of the original officers remained in Co. A. **Captain Marvin** and **First Lieutenant Colton** had been promoted to command of Co. B. **Lieutenant James Lewis** had risen to captain, then to lieutenant colonel from Co. C. None of the original officers of Co. D remained. **Lieutenant Penet** (Co. C), **Captain Plaskett** (Co. F), **Captain Stone** (Co. G), **Captain Smith** and **Lieutenant Clark** (Co. H), **Captain St. John** and **Lieutenant Johnston** (Co. I), **Captain Radiker** (Co. K) were still serving **Lieutenant Siver** was now adjutant.

Fifty-five men had died. One hundred had been discharged. A few had deserted. Only one-half of the original number remained.

**Captain Thomas Lewis** (Co. C) had died of typhoid fever Sept. 8. On Sept. 21 **Lieutenant Dewitt Mayo**, Tompkins (Co. A) died at Folly Island. On Oct. 17 **Captain William Stone** (Co. G), Margaretville, was granted a leave of absence, but died before reaching home.

**James M. Way** (Co. D), by profession a stone mason, was also a scientist. He discovered in the Catskill strata of rock at Franklin fish bone and fish scales unknown to other geologists at that time. He maintained a large correspondence with other scientists interested in his findings. He was nicknamed "The Professor" in the army. He died at Folly Island Oct. 7, 1863.

On Nov. 13 the 144<sup>th</sup> went on an unsuccessful reconnaissance to Seabrook Island and then returned to camp.

Nov. 29 found the regiment beginning seven days of fatigue duty on Kiawah Island, where fortifications were being built. Several details were sent to Cole's Island nearby.

Here there was a neutral zone on a bridge. Men of the opposing forces exchanged coffee for tobacco and newspapers. There was much friendly conversation, but no military secrets were divulged. Sometimes discouraged Confederates gave themselves up to the Union men.

The great expense of the siege of Charleston and inability to take Fort Sumter led to plans to withdraw the troops from Morris Island to Folly Island. It was thought that the presence of Union troops in Florida could bring that state back to the Union family of states. Therefore, in February, 1864, an order came to make a reconnaissance in force toward Charleston to cover the retirement of troops to Jacksonville.

The 144<sup>th</sup> was held in reserve. It participated in night picket duty. One result of this raid was the finding of the signal code which had enabled the Confederates to circumvent the moves of the Union troops.

But the Confederates met the Union regiments at Olustee, Fla., with an overwhelming force. To prevent further losses, on Feb. 12, they embarked on steamers and reached Jacksonville on the 24<sup>th</sup>.

Here they built fortifications. Military assignments were mostly picket duty, although occasional raids took place.

Time passed. On May 13 **Colonel William J. Slidell** took command of the 144<sup>th</sup>. Colonel Slidell was a native of Louisiana.

On May 21 two hundred men from the 144<sup>th</sup> were taken by the transport *Houghton*, convoyed by

the gunboat *Ottawa* and the armed steam launch *Columbiana*, up river to Picolata. Here they were joined by a regiment of colored troops and the 157<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteers. They started on a line of march but learned the rebels had gone beyond reach. They returned to Picolata on May 26. Two days later, May 28, the steamer *Mary Benton* returned them to Jacksonville.

Later an attempt was made to capture a rebel garrison at Camp Milton about 11 miles from Jacksonville. The enemy had evacuated. They set fire to the camp, but in their hurry to be away had left a large supply of provision which were heartily welcomed by the Union men.

This was the last expedition in Florida. The 144<sup>th</sup> was ordered to return to Hilton Head, S.C. This was the regiment's permanent campground as long as it was in the South. Members of the 144<sup>th</sup> furnished the headquarters guard.

A great many turtles abounded in the vicinity of the camp. Many of the men enjoyed night turtle hunting with subsequent feasting the next day.

The camp slogan became, "On to Charleston." On July 1 an expedition set out to acquire the Savannah River and the Charleston Railroad. A concerted effort of many divisions advanced by front and rear operations to take the city.

The 144<sup>th</sup> took the fortifications of John's Island from the retiring Confederates. Co. F was fired on by rebel cavalry concealed in a clump of woods. A bridge was built between Seabrook and John's Island.

July 4, 1864, was a very warm day. Intense heat and stifling dust harassed the men. There were frequent halts on the march to eat ripe plums for refreshments.

The next day several were wounded when they met rebel skirmishers,.

On July 8 they learned the enemy was being reinforced from Charleston. The 144<sup>th</sup> advanced to fight. The rebels turned on them in another direction. The regiment retired just in time.

Orderly **Sergeant Crowley** was killed. **Lewis Fitch** was captured while trying to get water for Crowley before he died. Both men belong to Co. B.

Co. E, which was commanded by **Captain John Clark**, was prominent in this engagement.

The sick and wounded were taken to the hospital boat *Peconic*. And here "Mrs. Sanitary," the Red Cross nurse, first cared for the men, washing and dressing them, providing clothes and handkerchiefs.

The 144<sup>th</sup> returned to Hilton Head. Nothing had been accomplished by the expedition. Later the regiment did help in an exchange of prisoners.

Note: There was more to this article but have been unable to find the next issues of the Walton Reporter of August 1958.