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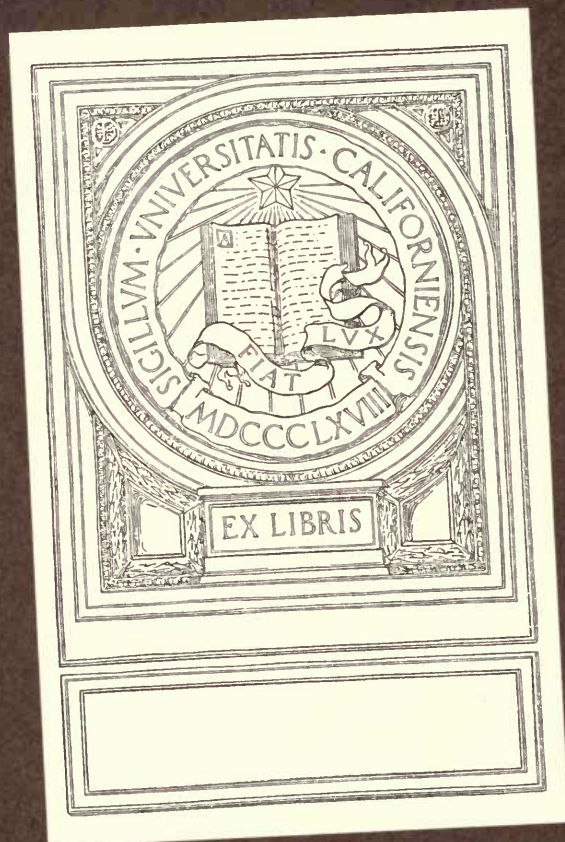
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The Thirty-Third Regiment Illinois Infantry in the Civil War 1861 - 1865

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At the request of the Directors of the Illinois Historical Society for the 1912
Annual Meeting of that Society.

The Regimental Association at its annual meeting Oct. 9th, 1912, approved it as a part of the Regimental History.

JAMES H. PLECKER, President.

VIRGIL G. WAY, Secretary-Treasurer.

It is not my purpose to furnish many of the details of the history of the Thirty-Third Illinois Infantry Regiment. Very few Illinois organizations have been so fully described in the military annals of the state. Yet as these technical military records are generally destitute of other valuable information for the benefit of general readers, I have therefore thought best to furnish a few historical side lights, which must not, however, be allowed to obscure the brilliant heroism and patriotism of the actors, and which it may be hoped will bring their actions into clearer view.

Those of us who remember the tremendous exertions needed during the war to fill the ranks of the army and keep them filled, are well aware that there were good reasons for the attempts that were made, especially in the largest states, to group together certain nationalities or classes of men into special regiments. Thus the Nineteenth Illinois Infantry, one of the best known of the earlier organizations, was called the Chicago Zouaves, from the fact that a portion of the regiment practiced the famous Zouave drill.

There was also in 1861, the well known German Regiment, the Twenty-Fourth Illinois Infantry, called the First Hecker Regiment, and again in 1862, during our greatest out-pouring of volunteers, the Eighty-Second Illinois was often called the Second Hecker Regiment.

The Forty-Fifth, raised mostly in Jo Daviess and Stephenson Counties, was called the Lead Mine Regiment. The Sixty-Third was called the Preachers' Regiment and contained a large sprinkling of Southern Illinois Baptists.

The Thirty-Third Illinois Infantry Regiment was quite well known for the first years of the war, as the Normal or School Teachers' Regiment. These various designations by nationalities or otherwise were of great assistance to the public in their almost vain efforts to keep track of such favorite organizations as people desired to follow, through the newspapers or other reports, and I shall proceed to enlarge somewhat on the early history of that regiment, in order to illustrate more fully the importance of these special designations and the influence they exerted upon the patriotic movements of the times, after which, I shall give a brief condensation of its military history with other historical military side-lights.

A few months previous to the out-break of the Civil War, just as the war clouds began to threaten, the legislature of this state was called upon to appropriate quite a sum to finish paying the cost of the new Normal building at Bloomington—the village of Normal not then having organized. The donations of the citizens of Bloomington and of the County of McLean, promised in the spring of 1857, were so enormously depreciated by the panic of the autumn of the same year, that the large building then started, finished in 1861, needed the state's assistance to the extent of \$65,000, which was generously given by the state in February, 1861, at a time when the dark shadow of the coming rebellion might well have obscured that educational revival, which had made such a promising beginning by the passage of the Free School Law of 1855, which gave that tremendous impetus to the cause of the public schools, which are now the pride of the people of Illinois.

It will do no harm to examine the status of educational matters in 1861. The people of this state between 1850 and 1860 had been aroused to the importance of free schools, to a degree almost incomprehensible to the present generation. They had seen suddenly spring up a free school system with a State Superintendent, with school districts possessing boards of school directors, which had almost absolute power to locate and build new school houses, and with liberal authority to raise money for school purposes.

The change from semi-subscription schools to the beginning of a better public school system, had created a demand for a great many well educated school teachers, and this demand by 1857 had culminated in the law organizing the State Normal University, which within a few months thereafter was located at Bloomington. The use of a part of the state's college and seminary funds for this institution was one reason for giving this Normal school the name of the university, though there was another potent reason, which was the rising prospect for combining with this pioneer Normal, the expected State University.

The subsequent organization of this State University in 1866, after the national appropriation of public land for the support of agricultural colleges, gave Bloomington and McLean County such hope for the location of this great University, that they made the magnificent and unparalleled offer of \$550,000.00 for its location, and the loss of this valuable educational institution was a bitter disappointment to those who made the offer. As an active laborer in this great effort, when I happened to be the editor of the Bloomington Pantagraph, I can give assurance that time has not as yet fully alleviated my disappointment of forty-six years ago.

The Illinois Normal was the first school of its kind west of the Alleghany mountains and it focused the attention of the educational people of the entire West. Its first class of ten graduated in 1860 and the next class, of which I was a member, finished the course in 1861, in the worst of the nation's agonizing throes of the great Civil War.

Immediately after the out-break of the war in April, the Normal students organized themselves into what was called the Normal Rifles, and by the end of the school year on July first, had become somewhat proficient under a hired drill master. The threatening war clouds warned us that our services would soon be needed, although the nation's shortage of arms and military officers very nearly paralyzed all efforts to place men in the field, and enlistments by the middle of July had practically ceased in all of the northern states.

President Charles E. Hovey of the Normal, began to form plans to raise a regiment of Normal teachers, pupils, college students and educational men immediately after the close of the summer term, and the members of the Normal Rifles determined before they

started for their homes in different parts of the state, to enlist as a Company rather than to scatter themselves in different companies, should the Government call for more volunteers. This call came immediately after the battle of Bull Run, which took place July Twenty-first.

President Hovey was in Washington offering to raise a new regiment a few days before the sad Bull Run defeat, but the Government officers were then confident that the war was about over, and blindly refused all such offers. Very different was the case the day after the battle, and President Hovey, now Colonel Hovey, came home with full power to raise the regiment. He issued a call in the newspapers and the response was immediate. The patriotism of Illinois blazed out at that period with intense brilliancy. Regiment after regiment was offered for three years, or during the war. Between July and December, 1861, the regimental numbers ran from the Twenty-eighth to the Fifty-eighth, and the state was one great camp of military organization, instruction and patriotic devotion.

Over two-thirds of the sixty young men in the infant Normal volunteered, together with several of the professors, then called teachers, and two or three members of the State Board of Education.

The full regiment of one thousand men leaving Camp Butler for the front on September nineteenth, included quite a number of college boys, teachers and educational men, together with the Normal nucleus, giving the regiment altogether some right to be called the "Normal Regiment," by which title it was known through the first two or three years of the war.

There was no other Western regiment which contained such a large number of students and teachers, except the Forty-Third Ohio. The Colonel of this regiment was James A. Garfield, who was President of Hiram College at Mentor, Ohio, on the Western Reserve. I well remember of hearing Colonel Hovey tell us of this student regiment just as we were about to leave Normal, and that he then said, "Watch that man Garfield." I watched him, and when he was nominated for the Presidency in 1880, I gave my most enthusiastic efforts to assist in that election.

It happened in the Vicksburg Campaign at the battle of Champion's Hill in May, 1863, that Garfield's Regiment, the Forty-Third Ohio, and our Normal regiment took part together on the skirmish line of that important battle.

There was no other Western Normal School except ours in 1861. Our Normal organization coupled with the fact that such schools were hoping to meet a vital need of the Western school system, gave a certain prominence to the organization that made it very easy to fill our ranks with some of the best material in the whole army, and yet there was after all, but a trifling superiority over other regiments of the same year, and perhaps we were somewhat egotistic, and we may have well deserved some of the same

casms concerning us which were floating around in military circles.

I have dwelt somewhat at length upon the distinctive origin of the Thirty-Third Infantry because to a certain extent, it helps illustrate the importance felt by the general public in the efforts to separate the different companies, regiments, batteries and brigades from among other commands of the immense armies in the field, and to trace their military histories through their different movements, marches, organizations and battles of that great conflict. Even with all of these occasional aids, the friends of different organizations very often failed to know where to look for accounts of their loved ones, whether they were in the swamps of the South, in the operations on the Gulf, or in the Grand Army of the Potomac.

It was simply impossible for the general public to remember the military designations of the different organizations.

The Students' Company at Normal, the Normal Rifles, became the nucleus of the first company consisting of about one hundred men, and was called Company A. Besides this, two whole companies—C and G—were raised in McLean County, and the other seven companies came from various counties like Bureau, Pike, Christian, Knox, Stark, LaSalle and others.

The month of August, 1861, when most of the young men volunteered, was a remarkable date in our nation's history. The disgraceful defeat at Bull Run had been the means of thoroughly alarming the North. There was now no idea of coercing the South in ninety days as there had been in May and June. A long war and bloody one, instead of three months of picnicing, was now plainly in sight. About all of the patriotic logic we had to cheer us was about like this: If a state should secede from the National Government, a county could secede from the state. If all of these varieties of secession could flourish, there could be no government at all. If we were to have no governments, we should have bloody anarchy, and rather than live in anarchy, we had better take our chances with "Uncle Sam," who appeared to be gathering quite a vigorous army, and if we would all stand together, we could at least look forward to a settled government at some time in the future, even if we should be obliged in the end to let the "erring sisters go in peace," as was recommended by more than one of our country's leaders.

The time had not yet come, though it arrived in that still more gloomy August one year later, when many men of family must volunteer. Our own ranks were mostly filled with mere boys. In the company in which I enlisted only four were married men. Buoyant hope was on every hand. No one appeared to be afraid of disaster. Disease had no terrors. The one great longing of every soldier, at least in appearance, was to engage in a fight with the enemy. We hungered and thirsted for military knowledge, and en-

tered upon our duties with light hearts, little thinking before the end of three years' enlistment our regiment, with many others, would voluntarily re-enlist for another three years, and become a part of that proud army of re-enlisted veterans whose valor and patriotism finally, in 1864 and 1865, did more to end the war and discourage the enemy, than all the battles of the first three years of agonizing efforts.

The Students' Company A represented thirty-one different counties, the whole regiment contained men from sixty-seven different counties, and it is believed no other Illinois organization contained so many men from different counties, making this regiment almost truly a representation of the whole state.

Its history has been written more fully perhaps than that of any other regiment. It is contained in the official records of the rebellion; in the Adjutant-general's reports of both the nation and the state; in official form with all of the state's military organizations, in both national and state records. Besides this, in 1902 the survivors of the Thirty-Third Regiment published a complete and very full history, largely written by Colonel I. H. Elliott, now living in New Mexico, and who was Adjutant-general of Illinois under Governor Cullom in 1880 to 1884. The whole book was edited and partially written by Mr. V. G. Way of Gibson City, a member of this Society. It is said by the best authorities to be a model regimental history, especially in its full roster accounting for the over two thousand different soldiers, who were at one time and another upon its muster-rolls.

Judge A. O. Marshall of Joliet, also a member of this Society, one of our college students, who came from Knox College, published soon after the war, his "Army Life or Recollections of a Private Soldier" that had a large sale in the northern part of the state, and in various other publications this regiment has been well remembered. Judge Marshall was a member of Company A, to which I belonged.

When the Thirty-Third was ordered from Camp Butler to the Potomac in 1861, there was great indignation because it was the soldiers' opinion there would be no fighting in Virginia. Our officers spent the whole night in telegraphing to Washington to have our destination changed to the Western Department, where General Fremont was the military idol of the army. We laid on the ground at the station all that night at classic Jimtown and were delighted in the morning to find our destination was changed to St. Louis.

While guarding Pilot Knob and the Iron Mountain Railroad we were fortunate enough on October 21, 1861, to be slightly engaged in the battle of Fredericktown, Missouri, a mere skirmish, but heralded as one of the first successful battles of the war, and we began to feel we were becoming of some military consequence. Frontier guarding and frontier march-

ing were our monotonous duties until July 7, 1862, when we again met the enemy at what was called Cache River or Cotton Plant in Arkansas, a successful engagement of considerable importance, while we were on the march down the White River. Colonel Hovey was in command of our detachment, was wounded and was made Brigadier-general for his gallantry.

Our Students' Company A was in the advance on this occasion when its captain, L. H. Potter, Normal Professor of Literature, was severely wounded. I was First Lieutenant of the Company and when the colonel of the regiment and the captain of my Company were both promoted, my own rank was advanced one step, and I became the captain and thus remained until April, 1863, when I resigned on account of weakness from typhoid and malarial fevers.

It was the fate of this regiment to be on duty during the summer of 1862 in the malarious district of Eastern Arkansas and Western Mississippi. This region is now well known as a marvelously rich cotton country, and even before the war, its richest lands were occupied by money making planters, who went to the hills or to the North during the hot months, leaving their slaves and overseers to raise and gather the cotton. Very few white people dared to brave the deadly climate, and it is no wonder that our laborious scouting and foraging duties brought on dangerous sickness. The sickness was so serious that early in October the whole regiment was sent North, as a sanitary measure, to a point near St. Louis.

In the winter of 1862 and 1863 we were marched and counter-marched through southeastern Missouri to no purpose, seeing no enemy, hearing of none, not even firing a gun, and we solemnly believe, even to this day, that no one at Washington ever knew of this winter campaign. But our sick men recovered their health so that when we were ordered to join the Vicksburg Campaign in March, 1863, the regiment was in tip-top health, ready for any duty, but extremely unwilling to again take up the line of march in Louisiana or Mississippi near Vicksburg in that well known malarious region. Here it became a portion of that grand army of Illinois soldiers who formed a large part of General Grant's magnificent Vicksburg army of seventy thousand men. From this time forward for many months it became attached to General McClernand's Thirteenth Army Corps. Personally, I was a member of this Corps only ten days, and was not in the Vicksburg Campaign.

The battles around Vicksburg, and the famous Charge on Vicksburg constitute a very large portion of the history of the Civil War. Defeat after defeat in 1862 caused the world to doubt whether the Mississippi River ever would be opened to the sea. Vicksburg, until July 4, 1863, was the pivotal place upon which rested our hopes of the successful issue of the war, even as in 1803, the possession of Louisiana meant the probable perpetuity of the Union.

When General Grant ordered the grand movement of his troops, a part of his army marched overland along the levee on the western bank of the Mississippi, out of the range of Vicksburg's heavy guns. These troops then crossed the river in the steamboats, which had bravely and successfully run past the Vicksburg batteries. The Thirty-Third took an active part in that series of great victories known as the battles before Vicksburg, Grand Gulf, Magnolia Hills, Black River Bridge, Champion's Hill and others, which were all successfully fought against General Pemberton's Vicksburg Army, which had come out of the trenches to meet Grant's Army in the open field. In the fight of Black River Bridge, where the rebels had thrown up defensive works and had mounted a large number of heavy cannons, the Thirty-Third with other troops, made a remarkable successful charge with very little blood-shed, and captured these cannons, which was perhaps the most important military feat of the whole campaign.

The battle of Champion's Hill was a last desperate attempt on the part of General Pemberton's army to keep the Yankees from the rear of Vicksburg, but all to no avail, as General Grant's army soon compelled General Pemberton to withdraw into the fortifications and to act entirely on the defensive.

The Thirty-Third boys in the Thirteenth Army Corps were among the heroes in the awful charge on the fortifications of Vicksburg on the Twenty-second of May. The regiment suffered terribly in that charge. One color bearer was killed and others sustained the flag which shows, to this day, blood stains and bullet marks, in its repository in the flag case of the McLean County Historical Society.

Company E, the Bureau County Company, went into this charge with thirty-two men, eleven of whom were killed and all of the rest were wounded with one exception—thus furnishing an evidence of bravery not easily matched in the record of the Civil War.

General Pemberton's army was, however, barely successful in holding their works in that awful day, and from this time until the end of June, Grant's great army prosecuted the Siege of Vicksburg with the utmost heroism, fighting and digging, enduring the summer's great heat and holding back the Confederate re-inforcements, which in the rear were struggling to relieve Pemberton.

Nothing in the annals of the war, not even the events on the Potomac, or in the famous battles around Atlanta and Chattanooga, excelled the bravery and obstinacy of these famous battles around Vicksburg, during that world famous Siege of Vicksburg, which culminated in the surrender of that stronghold with its thirty thousand defenders, on the Fourth day of July, 1863. This event, together with the success of the Union Army at Gettysburg on the Third and Fourth days of July in the same year, marks the beginning of the down-fall of the Confederate Army.

The history of the Thirty-Third Regiment will forever be associated with the record of the great

Vicksburg Campaign, at which time General Grant's army reckoned nearly one-half of its members as representatives of the great State of Illinois.

After considerable faithful service in guarding the railroads in Louisiana during the rest of 1863 and the most of 1864, the regiment found itself in November, 1863, at Matagorda Bay in Texas. Here it took part in the capture of Fort Esperanza, a sea coast fort of no particular consequence, and once more the regiment was almost out of the knowledge of the people of the United States. It made itself heard from however, even here, proving to the country that its splendid record at Vicksburg and other places was not to be considered its total contribution to the great cause.

By a Government Order an important offer was made to all of the old three year regiments, whose full three years lacked about six or eight months of expiration, which provided that if three-fourths of the soldiers of each regiment would re-enlist for three years more, a bounty of Four Hundred Dollars each would be given, together with a thirty days' furlough, to all who should thus volunteer, and that the new organization should be called "Veteran Volunteers."

The Thirty-Third was then at Indianola, Texas, and at once entered heartily into the spirit of the order and began to perfect the new regimental organization.

We cannot say too much in praise of these seasoned and well drilled soldiers who generously and patriotically re-enlisted at that period. They but imperfectly realized the immense importance and the magnitude of their actions. The war had progressed to a point where few valuable soldiers could be obtained by volunteering. Such recruits and volunteers as were found after the beginning of 1863, were generally obtained by the payment of very large bounties. This stimulated what was called "bounty jumping" or desertion for the sake of a new enlistment under another name in another state to such a degree that filling the ranks of an old regiment accomplished very little towards placing good soldiers at the front.

The ranks of the Southern Army were, it is true, becoming rapidly thinned by disease, desertion and death, and conscription was failing to give as good results as it had given to this date. The men who remained in that army now began to realize that their cause was probably hopeless, but the desperation of the South appeared to be about equal to the stubborn resistance of the North. And the value of this remarkable addition of veteran volunteers to the fighting strength of the Union Army was never fully realized until the war was over. And as our people then began to turn their thoughts away from everything relating to the war and its horrors, it has happened that the general public never knew, and never will know, the full importance of the noble efforts of these veterans of 1864.

These patriotic volunteers were called veterans, and the word veteran in 1865 meant one of these re-enlisted heroes. Now the word is applied to any old soldier, whether his service was short or long, and it has come about that the veteran volunteers of 1864 and 1865, who so well deserve to be a class by themselves, are rarely considered worthy of any more credit than any other veterans.

The Thirty-Third Illinois Veteran Volunteer Infantry Regiment was mustered into the service at Indianola, Texas, on that far off sandy coast January 7, 1864. On February twenty-eighth, just before starting from New Orleans for their thirty days' furlough to their homes, they gave an exhibition drill which won the very highest commendation from military officials of high rank.

They proceeded to Bloomington, Illinois, where they were given a grand reception by the citizens, and from there went to their homes, where they enjoyed a well earned furlough.

These veteran volunteers knew what it was to hear the whistle of rebel bullets, to watch the curving and hissing shells, to listen to the roar of the deadly artillery, to march up to the cannon's mouth, and see their dearest comrades fall dying or wounded from their advancing ranks. They realized the deadliness of the typhoid and malarious hospitals, the irksomeness of the idle camp, the weariness of the forced march, the suffering from cold and wet, and the wearing weakness resulting from half rations.

It was one of these same volunteers who wrote the following:

"Farewell to home; farewell to kindred.

We have pledged ourselves for three years more.

We will each be in at the death of treason,

Or perish in the Thirteenth Army Corps."

The nation secured from this wonderful outburst of patriotism, in all nearly two hundred thousand of the very cream of the army, the very bravest and best soldiers of that Grand Army of the Republic, to which the nation is so greatly indebted.

It is not over-estimating the value of this great reinforcement to assert it as fully equal to an addition to the army of more than half million of the average membership of that grand United States Army. We need not wonder therefore that in the opinion of good judges, the re-election of Abraham Lincoln in the fall of 1864, added to this noble offering on the part of our patriotic army in the field, actually turned the scale in favor of the success of our National Army.

The share of the State of Illinois in this Veteran Volunteer organization represents seventy different veteran volunteer regiments, and a statement of this whole proceeding on the part of the soldiers of this State, should be fully and completely set forth by the Illinois State Historical Society through some special publication, and the Society will not have performed its full duty towards this particular class

of its soldiers, until it shall have specifically and properly performed this great work.

The subsequent service of this regiment took place mostly in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. It participated in the capture of Spanish Fort at Mobile Bay, Alabama, and performed much marching and railroad guarding. A terrible railroad accident near Boulte Station, Louisiana, March 2, 1865, was as severe upon the regiment as almost any battle in which it participated, no less than eighty having been

killed or severely wounded, the deaths having been about one-fourth of this number.

The flags carried by the regiment at its muster out at Springfield on Dec. 7, 1865, were entitled to bear the names of the following battles: Fredericktown, Missouri; Cotton Plant, Arkansas; Fort Gibson; Magnolia Hills; Black River Bridge; Champion's Hill; Charge on Vicksburg; Siege of Vicksburg; Jackson, Mississippi; Fort Esperanza, Texas; Spanish Fort, and Fort Blakely, Alabama.

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