

THE MOUNT AMWELL NEWS

The Civil War Death of Joseph Johnson By David R. Reading

Dominick Mazzagetti, longtime history columnist for the Hunterdon County Democrat, has recently published a book of letters written by two Hunterdon county men to local newspapers during the Civil War (see Sidebar). Lucian A. Voorhees and William Mackenzie Thompson wrote over 100 letters between 1862 and April 1864 until they were both killed at the battle of Spotsylvania— Voorhees on May 8th and Thompson on May 12th.

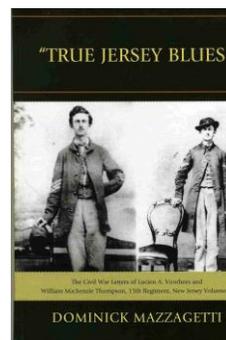
They were soldiers in the 15th Regiment, New Jersey Volunteers, mustered in Flemington to answer President Lincoln's call in July of 1862 for five more New Jersey Regiments. The men were drawn from Morris, Warren, Hunterdon, Sussex, and Somerset counties. After a day of much fanfare and optimistic farewells at the Fairgrounds, the 15th traveled by train through Lambertville, Trenton, Philadelphia, and Baltimore and eventually arrived in Washington on August 30th, 1862.

They would join the Army of The Potomac under Gen Burnside and fight at Fredericksburg, Virginia in December 18. After wintering at White Oak Church, Virginia, the 15th would see a bloody and difficult year in 1863. In May, A second crossing of the Rappahannock and fighting at Fredericksburg, in June, a third crossing and battle at Fredericksburg, and in July a march North to Gettysburg. At Gettysburg, the 15th were held in reserve, but this was only a temporary respite, because under Gen. George Meade the Army of The Potomac would pursue Lee into Virginia and the 15th would fight at Warrenton, White Sulpher Springs, Culpepper, and Warrenton again, the battle of the Rappahannock, and in December at Mine Run.

The 15th as part of the VI Corps encamped at Brandy Station near Culpepper Virginia for the winter of 1863-64. President Lincoln nominated Ulysses S. Grant as Lt. General and head of the Armies of the United States on March 9th, 1864. On May 4th, under

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Dominick Mazzagetti, *“True Jersey Blues”, The Civil War Letters of Lucien Voorhees and William Mackenzie Thompson, 15th Regiment, New Jersey Volunteers* (Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011). Hardcover, 253 pages. Available on Amazon and Barnes and Noble. \$65.

Grant, the Army of the Potomac began marching south towards Richmond. The 15th marched 16 miles and bivouacked the night of the 4th near Flat Run Brook. The next day the Confederate and Union armies would begin one of the bloodiest series of battles of the war. The Wilderness on May 5, 6, 7, Spotsylvania on May 8 to 11, where Voorhees and Thompson lost the lives, and continuing on to Spotsylvania Court House, the North and South Anna River, Hanover Courthouse, Tolopotomy Creek, and on June 1st to the 11th, Cold Harbor, Virginia . The battle at Cold Harbor was one of the most horrific of the war—approximately 15,000 killed or wounded—7000 union casualties in an hour on the morning of June 3. The 15th suffered some 50 casualties, and Alanson A. Haines, the regimental Chaplin wrote, “No words can adequately describe the horror of the twelve days we had spent there, and the sufferings we endured.”¹

After the disaster at Cold Harbor, Grant decided to change the strategic goal of capturing Richmond from the north and instead would attempt to cut it off from the rest of the confederacy by taking Petersburg to the south. The 15th and the First New Jersey Brigade entered into the siege of Petersburg on June 16th. Meanwhile, Lee confident after his victory at

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Cold Harbor was entertaining thoughts of invading Washington itself. Thus, on June 13th under orders from Lee, Lt. General Jubal Anderson Early led his Second Corps of the Army of Virginia from outside Richmond up through the Shenandoah Valley to the north of Washington and was poised with 10,000 troops on July 11th to invade a poorly defended Washington. But Grant had already ordered the VI Corps from Petersburg back to Washington to bolster the city's defenses. The 15th arrived by boat at the Sixth Street Wharf around noon on the 11th and proceeded to Ft. Stevens, north of the city to face Early. On the afternoon of July 11th General Early made a decision to hold off the invasion one more day to let his weary troops rest, giving Major General Horatio Wright's VI Corps time to form a defense of the city. The Confederates lost the opportunity to inflict a major blow to the Union and as one Union wag put it "The war could have been lost but Early was late."

The 15th Regiment of the New Jersey Volunteers, without Sgt. Lucian A. Voorhees and Pvt. William Mackenzie Thompson, killed two months earlier, pursued Early towards the Shenandoah Valley and fought engagements at Snicker's Gap, Strasburg, Winchester, and Charleston in July and August. They camped at Berryville, Virginia (about 20 miles east of Winchester) from September 3rd through the 19th. It was during this encampment that the decimated, war weary regiment received a new contingent of troops. According to Haines, 53 recruits were received on September 3rd with more arriving every few days. Joseph Johnson, 20, son of Asher Johnson and Mary Ann Reading, is shown in the official rolls as joining the 15th on September 5, 1864. It was, according to Haines, not an enjoyable occasion: "They were unarmed, without tents and rations. In the cold rains which followed their arrival they had a rough experience."² The regiment was now made up of mostly recruits and substitutes.



Engraving reads "Joseph Johnson son of Asher & Mary A. Johnson, Co. K, 15th Regt. NJ d. at Baltimore Hospital, MD, 8 Dec. 1864." Grave marker at Reading Burial Ground (aka Johnson Cemetery), Rosemont, Hunterdon County, New Jersey.

It was also no longer attached to the Army of the Potomac. In August General Grant had created the Army of the Shenandoah under Maj. Gen. Philip Sheridan to counter Jubal Early in the Shenandoah Valley. It included the VI Corps and consequently the 15th Regiment. On the 19th of September, the 15th broke camp at Berryville and marched into battle at the Opequan River against Early's Confederates. Over the next two weeks the 15th would fight at Fisher's Hill, New Market, and Mt. Jackson. And finally at Cedar Creek on October 19th, Early would be defeated, ending the Shenandoah campaign for 1864 with a Union victory.

It is unknown if Joseph Johnson fought in these actions. Chaplin Haines notes that on September 23rd, of the 249 enlisted men listed in the field report there were a large number of unarmed recruits.³ It is simply not known if Joseph Johnson ever fired a shot for the Union army. The regimental records list him as dying in a Baltimore hospital of Typhoid fever on December 8, 1864.

The disease often referred to as "Camp Fever" was the number two killer, at one-fourth of disease deaths during the Civil War. It is very severe, and causes a high fever, intense headache, intense rash, and delirium transmitted by the ingestion of food or water contaminated with the feces of an infected person, which contain the bacterium *Salmonella enterica*, serovar Typhi. According to military records, typhoid took the lives of 29,336 Union soldiers. This is approximately 25 percent of all deaths caused by disease. The South suffered also. For every Confederate soldier killed in battle, three died from disease.

The course of untreated typhoid fever is generally divided into four individual stages, each lasting approximately one week. Applying the four week period to Johnson's death, the latest estimated date for contracting Typhoid would have been November 9, 1864. Interestingly, this is the date that the 15th moved to a new camp seven miles from its battleground camp near Cedar Creek. The earliest date is much harder to pinpoint.

During the Civil War, according to U.S. Army statistics, the Union Army had 79,462 admissions to hospitals for Typhoid and of those 29,336 died.³ While this mortality rate of nearly 37% is high, 63% of Typhoid sufferers survived. Joseph Johnson could have contracted the disease within days of his arrival at Berryville in September or any time after

that up to the move from Cedar Creek in the first week of November. The uncertainty of Typhoid survival obscures the combat record of Joseph Johnson, but his death is no less tragic than those of the fallen soldiers he was supposed to replace. His death may have been without glory, but is certainly was not without honor.

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1. Alanson A. Haines, *History of the Fifteen Regiment New Jersey Volunteers* (New York: Jenkins & Thomas, Printers, 1883; repr Gaithersburg, MD: Old Soldiers Books, nd), 215
 2. Haines, 253.
 3. Haines, 268.
 4. The Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War, Volume IX, *Communicable and Other Diseases*, Prepared Under the Direction Of Maj. Gen. M. W. Ireland *the Surgeon General* by Lieut. Col. Joseph F. Siler, M. C., U. S. Army, (U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1928). Table 1.0, page 17.

Announcements

Fall Luncheon Meeting

The fall meeting for 2012 is planned for Saturday October 20th (Save the date) at the Frenchtown Inn. Stephen Case, life member, has agreed to speak on the new (and not yet opened) American Revolution Museum in Philadelphia. Details will mailed in early September.

Hunterdon Chamber Internet Interview

On April 10th, Richard Gerstner, General Manager of the new Hunterdon Chamber Internet Radio Station interviewed Executor Director David Reading on the subject of the Mount Amwell Project. The Hunterdon County Chamber of Commerce launched the internet radio station to bring business issues, local news, and community information to the County. The Chamber will be the first Chamber in the US to have a 24 hour Internet Radio Station dedicated to this format, including national and international news on the hour from the Independent Radio News.

If you want to hear the radio interview go to the website below and select "Archives", next click on "As I see it", When the list appears you'll see the MP3 files. The interview starts on file 2012-04-10 10 at 7:50 and continues for the entire file 2012-04-10 10a.

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<http://www.hunterdonchamberradio.com/hosts.htm>

New Members

We are extremely pleased to announce four new members, Peter Kinsella, Richard Stothoff, Susan Alexander, and William McCrea.

Richard Stothoff (life member) is a local business man in Flemington and has been the President of the Hunterdon County Historical Society since 1995. He is a strong supporter of civic activities and we are extremely pleased to have his enthusiasm and wisdom in our organization.

Peter Kinsella (life member) is a former Mayor of Raritan Township and also very active in civic affairs. Currently he is a member of the Hunterdon County Tri-centennial Committee (with fellow MTAP member George Muller). The committee was formed in 2011 to plan the year long activities, lectures and events in 2014 celebrating the 300th anniversary of the founding of Hunterdon County. The MTAP has a strong interest in participating in the tri-centennial and we are very pleased with Pete's membership.

William McCrea lives in Cherryville outside of Flemington and is the caretaker of the Cherryville Baptist Church Cemetery. Bill has strong interest historic cemetery preservation and has used our on-line cemetery data base extensively. We are hoping that with Bill's passion we can finally begin to restore and stabilize more of Hunterdon's at-risk historic cemeteries.

Susan Alexander (life member) is a descendent of Col. George Reading's son Major Samuel Reading. She is a member of DAR and lives in Philmont, New York.

Deceased Members

Joan (Reading) Phoenix passed away on March 1, 2012 in Far Hills, New Jersey at the age of 81. Joan was the daughter of John G. Reading and Marjorie Ann Conroy. She was an original member of the MTAP. She worked on and volunteered on Steve Forbes presidential campaign in 1996 and 2000.

Cemetery Destruction

The Hendricks/Hendrickson-Family Association still needs help with their struggle to obtain justice for the mindless destruction of their family cemetery. Please visit their website for the latest progress.

www.gjoynson.com/hendrickson.htm and

and on facebook at

www.facebook.com/.../Hendricks...Hendrickson-Family-Association.

If you wish to send a donation to organization, you may write directly to the association president:

Andrew A Hendricks, MD
President,
Hendricks and Hendrickson Family Association
103 Rosewood Drive
Lumberton, NC 28358

Web site Members Access

The MTAP web site (www.mtamwell.org) includes a member's only page. Content includes current newsletters. To access simply click on the members page and enter user: member, password: mtap2008

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Phone:
703-549-2738

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