

## UNBEARABLE ENDURANCE

Submitted by Dr. Rhodes B. Holliman of Dublin, Virginia,  
his great grandson.

John Thomas Holliman was born on April 23, 1844, in Fayette County, AL. He was the fifth child of 13 of Uriah Holliman and Mary Polly Lucas Holliman. In his family, 2 of his older brothers and his father joined the Confederate Army plus a younger brother and a brother-in-law. Of these volunteers, only two would survive the War: John Thomas and his oldest brother, Lt. James Franklin Holliman of the 58<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry. His was a poor, backwoods, farming family who owned no slaves but stood ready to defend their homeland.

Under peer pressure, John Thomas joined Company H of the 41<sup>st</sup> Alabama Infantry Volunteers as a Private in April, 1862, in the town of Fayette. He would never be promoted. The 41<sup>st</sup> was made up of volunteers from Tuscaloosa, Greene, Fayette, Perry and Pickens counties, with Fayette County enlisting the most men in Companies B (88), H (132), and I (110). This was 26 % of the 1284 volunteers in the 41<sup>st</sup> from all counties.

The 41<sup>st</sup> was assembled in Tuscaloosa, AL, on May 16, 1862, to begin training. The sudden crowding of these men who were adjusted to living on isolated farms, and the subsequent exposure to polluted water, poor rations and unsanitary conditions of camp life, created an environment for epidemic disease (measles, typhoid, pneumonia). From May through July there were many deaths due to disease so that the first engagement at Chattanooga, TN, in August found only 700 men fit for duty. John Thomas fought skirmishes along the Tennessee River in the fall and was hotly engaged in the carnage of Stones River (Murfreesboro, TN, campaign) in early January, 1863. Thereafter, the 41<sup>st</sup> was deployed along The Army of Tennessee Defense Line at Manchester, Allisona, Tullahoma and McMinnville with frequent skirmishes through the spring of 1863.

In an effort to reinforce troops in the Mississippi Campaign, on May 23 rd, the 41<sup>st</sup> was transferred by rail to Chattanooga, Atlanta, Montgomery and Mobile, Meridian and Jackson. Arriving too late to be of help at Vicksburg, the 41<sup>st</sup> was outstanding in the Second Battle for Jackson, MS. After a month long rest, the 41<sup>st</sup> retraced its steps to Chattanooga. John Thomas was yet to face the blood bath at Chickamauga on Sept. 20<sup>th</sup> and the following siege of Chattanooga. The 41<sup>st</sup> left their positions on Missionary Ridge on November 19<sup>th</sup> and marched to Tyner's Station to join Gen. Gracie's brigade for the assault to retake Knoxville. Little did they anticipate that Union forces would overrun Missionary Ridge on November 25<sup>th</sup>. The attack on the Union fortifications at Knoxville was a catastrophe forcing the 41<sup>st</sup> to retreat toward Bean's Station over icy ground in freezing rain and snow. At this point John Thomas had no coat or shoes, leaving bloody tracks with every step. A battle at Bean's Station on December 14<sup>th</sup> left the 41<sup>st</sup> with about 350 men and officers: about 1/3rd the original enlistment. Winter encampment was made at Morristown, TN, and the Regiment marched into Bristol, VA, in April of 1864. They soon marched north to Abingdon where they boarded a train on April 16<sup>th</sup> for Richmond. Their next campaign began at Drewry's Bluff on the James River south of Richmond: an effort to prevent Union gunboats from sailing up to the Confederate capitol. The victory at Drewry's Bluff would become "the finest hour" for the 41<sup>st</sup> AL. On June 17<sup>th</sup>, the 41<sup>st</sup> moved into the trenches at Petersburg for the exhausting 9 month siege to follow. John Thomas would endure the unrelenting rifle and artillery fire until Feb. 1865. No words can describe the carnage of events in the trenches at Petersburg. During this time he would see two of his cousins from Co.B seriously wounded and one killed, shot in the head. He and other family members would bury his dead cousin in Old Blandford Cemetery at night in spite of sniper fire from Yankee pickets.

On Feb. 15<sup>th</sup>, 1865, John Thomas was near death from starvation and exposure in a frozen wasteland. He did not have shoes, a coat or blanket. He and two of his Company buddies, Sgt. Miles Bobo and Pvt. John A. Strong, pooled their money (\$17 Confederate) and bought a pone of cornbread being peddled by a black woman in the trenches. They ate it, put a white flag on a ramrod and walked over into the Union lines. The Federal

Archives state that John Thomas was sent to Washington, D.C., given the oath, and then sent to Holly Springs, MS, to await discharge. This is correct for Bobo and Strong but John Thomas' fate was different. This writer is in possession of a post-war note written by John Thomas that reads:

“In Co. H - 41 Ala at Petersburg Va.  
 On Feb 15 1865 about dark - went  
 over to Union. John South, Miles  
 Bobo. Carried Gard House that  
 night - Asked by officers to disclose  
 conditions and were carried from  
 post to post disclosing conditions in  
 Conf. (Gracies Army) Was in U S  
 Army about 1 week. Was then sent  
 to Washington and took Oath - was  
 sent to Baltimore Md - then throug  
 Pa to Indianapolis Ind & stayed in  
 Inda about 6 mo - war closed”

John Thomas was furloughed to a farmer in Indiana and he promised to stay and “make a crop”. Good to his word, in the fall of 1865 he tied the shoelaces of his new shoes, slung them over his shoulder and “came on home.” He walked cross country, alone and barefoot, about 600 miles to his home in west AL ! He went back to farming near the Caines Ridge Primitive Baptist Church where he is buried.

John Thomas did not receive a single furlough during his 3 ½ years of service. He was hospitalized several times, too ill to fight, but always returned to his Unit without furlough. He hated the War and frequently declared it was “a rich man's war and a poor man's fight.” He was held in contempt by many of his neighbors for the remainder of his life for his surrender. His first marriage in 1867 produced 3 children, only one of whom, a son, William Perry, lived to maturity. His wife died in 1872 giving birth to their third child. He married again in 1875 and produced 5 sons. He was a profound victim of post war traumatic shock and his countenance and personality displayed this condition until his death on July

12<sup>th</sup>, 1930, at age 86. He was withdrawn and depressed for 65 years having been subjected to unspeakable visions of death and hardship. He was denied a veteran's pension in his old age and died in poverty. He is buried next to his second wife, Martha Jane Walker, in Caines Ridge Primitive Baptist Cemetery on Route 159 just south of Fayette, AL. From his 6 sons, there are 6 branches of the Holliman family who have enjoyed life because their ancestor was prudent enough to recognize when death was close at hand and the goal was doomed to failure.

The 41<sup>st</sup> AL went on to fight at Hatcher's Run and the retreat to Appomattox where 98 of the original 1284 stood ready to answer the final roll call.



John Thomas Holliman

John Thomas Holliman, Born in Fayette County, Alabama, on April 23, 1844, died there July 12, 1930, burial at Cain's Ridge Cemetery, married 1st Sarah E. Corbett on November 21, 1867, she died September 18, 1872. He married Martha Jane Walker, daughter of Samuel Taylor Walker and Elizabeth Johnson Walker, formerly of Shelby County, Alabama, on February 11, 1875. CSA record: Member of Co. H. 41st Ala. Inf. Surrendered at Petersburg, Va.

He was a son of Uriah H. Holliman and wife Mary "Polly" Lucas Holliman, of Fayette County, Alabama. Uriah H. Holliman died at or near Oklona, Miss., of Measles-Pneumonia while in the Confederate Army. Burial there. Uriah H. Holliman was a son of Cornelius Holliman and wife Mary Plyler Holliman, both born in Lancaster County, S.C., thence moved to Chesterfield Co. S.C., thence to Anson County, N.C., thence to Fayette County, Alabama, around 1836, settling on what is now the Yerby farm at Newtonville. 1st wife died around 1838. He then married Mary Rainwater, widow of William Rainwater of the same community. Cornelius Holliman died near Bluff in Fayette County, in 1862. Burial place not known. Burial place of Mary Plyler Holliman not known, probably Newtonville area. She was a daughter of Charles Daniel Lucas, early settler in Tuscaloosa County, who died at Newtonville, burial in Indian Grave yard of Menze Hughes Farm near Hico community.