

GALLERY Faces of an Era

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 58th Alabama Infantry. His was a poor, backwoods, farming family who owned no slaves but stood ready to defend their homeland.

John Thomas joined Company H of the 41st Alabama Infantry Volunteers as a Private in April, 1862, in the town of Fayette. He would never be promoted. The 41st 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 41st from all counties.

The 41st 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 41st 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 41st was transferred by rail to Chattanooga, Atlanta, Montgomery and Mobile, Meridian and Jackson. Arriving too late to be of help at Vicksburg, the 41st was outstanding in the Second Battle for Jackson, MS. After a month long rest, the 41st retraced its steps to Chattanooga. John Thomas was yet to face the blood bath at Chickamauga on Sept. 20th and the following siege of Chattanooga. The 41st left their positions on Missionary Ridge on November 19th 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 25th. The attack on the Union fortifications at Knoxville was a catastrophe forcing the 41st 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 14th left the 41st with about 350men 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 16th 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 41st AL. On June 17th, the 41st 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.

On Feb. 15th, 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 !

John Thomas did not receive a single furlough during his 3 ½ years of service. 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 some 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, 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 12th, 1930, at age 86. He had 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 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 41st 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.

NAME: John Thomas Holliman

DATES: 1844 to 1930

ALLEGIANCE: Confederate

HIGHEST RANK: Private

UNIT: 41st Alabama Infantry Regiment

SERVICE RECORD: Enlisted as a Private in Company H, 41st Alabama Infantry in April, 1862.

Participated in the Tennessee River skirmishes, August - December, 1862. Murfreesboro, TN (Stone's River), December 31 - January 2, 1863. Jackson, MS (Second Battle), July 9, 1863.

Chickamauga, GA, September 20, 1863. East TN Winter Campaign, September - November, 1863. Battle of Knoxville, November 28, 1863. Battle at Bean Station, December 14, 1863.

Winter Camp at Morristown, TN, December - April, 1864. Drewery's Bluff and Dutch Gap, May 16, 1864. Siege at Petersburg, began June 17, 1864. Battle of the Crater, July 30, 1864.

Surrendered at Petersburg, February 15, 1865. Walked home to Fayette, AL, September, 1865.