

# A Capsule History of the Thirty-third Regiment, Wisconsin Volunteers

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*Robert Braun is currently finalizing a book-length study of the Thirty-third Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry. This book is thoroughly footnoted and rich in detail. Please contact Robert Braun if you wish to receive information regarding the release date of the book.*

The experiences and campaigns of the Thirty-third Wisconsin were and remain representative of the bulk of Wisconsin regiments the state sent to the war. Most Wisconsin regiments served in the Western Theater; most were involved in gritty, exhausting, long-range campaigns, summer and winter; most were involved in a myriad of smaller actions, marches and skirmishes that have escaped the attention of both contemporary and modern chroniclers of Wisconsin's Civil War experience. The service of the Thirty-third Wisconsin was no exception. Superior officers and commanders constantly called upon the regiment to act as a rear-guard or to rescue the army from predicaments caused by the poor decisions of others.

There is no elan or glamour of a Gettysburg in this regiment's story -- only the dogged, determined, devil-take-the-hindmost style of warfare that won the war in the Western Confederacy. Here is an overview of the Thirty-third Wisconsin's largely untold story:

The Thirty-third Wisconsin was mustered into Federal service on October 18, 1862 at Camp Utley, Racine, Wisconsin. The regiment's field officers included:

Colonel: Jonathan B. Moore (former Sheriff of Grant County, and antebellum militia captain) Lieutenant Colonel: Frederick S. Lovell (Kenosha attorney and former Speaker of the State Assembly) Major: Horatio H. Virgin (son of state senator Noah Virgin of Grant County, and former Adjutant, Second Wisconsin Cavalry)

Recruiting offices accepted enlistments from the counties of Grant, Lafayette, Iowa, Rock, and Kenosha Counties. Some of the companies sported company flags, like Companies "D," "H," and "I", or adopted martial nicknames. These included: "Moore's Union Guards" (Company A); "Gurley's Hawks" (Company C); "Blake's Prairie Rangers" (Company D); "Rock County Plough Boys" (Company E); "Boscobel Rangers" (Company G); "Union Avengers" (Company H); and the "Lovell Guards" (Company I). Initially, the companies were captained by:

A: Jeremiah C. Moore (Colonel Moore's brother) B: George R. Frank C: John Gurley D: William Earnhart E: Ira Miltimore F: A. Zeily Wemple G: Frank B. Burdick H: Joseph F. Linsley I: Walter Cook K: Adoniram Witcher

Colonel Moore's saw to the initial issue of the regiment: uniform coats, foot pattern trousers of sky-blue kersey, Pattern of 1858 dress hats with trimmings, shoes, socks, shirts of gray wool-flannel, standard Federal infantry accouterments, haversacks, canteens, knapsacks, mess furniture, and wool blankets. The regiment was armed with Pattern of 1853 "Tower" Enfield rifle-muskets. Quartermaster John Nichols issued shelter tents, fatigue blouses, and rubber blankets after the regiment arrived in Memphis, Tennessee.

The Thirty-third Wisconsin entrained for the seat of war on November 12, 1862, numbering 902 officers and men. The Chicago Tribune and other newspapers soon proclaimed the Thirty-third Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry a well-drilled and well-led regiment. Arriving in Cairo, Illinois, the regiment boarded steamer Universe, and traveled south towards their destination-- Memphis, Tennessee. There, Maj. Gen. U. S. Grant included the Thirty-third Wisconsin in his overland campaign for Jackson and Vicksburg, Mississippi. The principle route of march followed along Mississippi Central Railroad south to Jackson. Grant ordered his divisions forward on November 27, 1862

The blue-clad columns slogged southward in wintry weather, meeting little opposition. Confederate forces in the area quietly withdrew before Grant's juggernaut. Unfortunately, the sudden capture of Grant's huge supply base at Holly Springs, Mississippi by Confederate raider Earl Van Dorn forced Grant to suspend further operations along the Mississippi Central Railroad. Their supplies cut off, Thirty-third Wisconsin subsisted on half- rations and foraged for field corn to supplement their meager issue of food. By January 12, 1863, orders directed the regiment to encamp at the rail junction at Moscow, Tennessee.

Modern investigators have compared their stay at the Moscow camp to the "Valley Forge" experience suffered by their colonial ancestors. Camped in "wretched shelter tents" and lashed by wintry weather, some thirty-two soldiers succumbed to measles and dysentery brought on by poor shelter and conditions. The regiment returned to Memphis in early March 1863.

With the failure of his overland campaign, Grant determined to sent cavalry and infantry columns south and fan out into the Mississippi interior, covering wide areas and confusing the Confederate commanders as to his true intentions. Grant designated two such infantry probes to cover the cavalry foray led by Col. Benjamin Grierson. Colonel George Bryant, Twelfth Wisconsin Infantry, commanded one of the infantry columns. Orders directed Bryant to march a column to Coldwater Station, Mississippi, and thence on to Panola, in search of Confederate state troops and partisans. The Thirty-third Wisconsin accompanied the regiments Bryant handpicked for the expedition.

The Thirty-third's "baptism of fire" came on April 19, 1863 at Perry's Ferry on the Coldwater River. In a skirmish with Mississippi state troops, Colonel Moore positioned the Thirty-third Regiment on the opposite side of the Coldwater River and blasted away at the enemy for approximately six hours. Two Wisconsin officers were struck and killed as the Thirty-third formed on a second position: Captain Joseph Linsley of "H," struck on

the left side of his head, and Lieutenant Henry S. Swift of "E," shot through the heart as he brought his company into line. Linsley died as he collapsed against acting Orderly Sergeant William Coburn of "H." Two other Wisconsin soldiers were wounded. Having accomplished its object, the expedition eventually returned to Memphis.

Embarking for Vicksburg on May 17, 1863, the regiment commenced active siege operations on May 28, 1863 as part of "Lauman's Approach" along the Hall's Ferry Road running southeast from Vicksburg. Involved in numerous skirmishes with the Georgia and Tennessee troops that opposed them, the regiment engaged in active digging of several parallels in support of the approach toward a confederate earthen fort known as the "Salient Work." The soldiers dug a zig-zag sap to within 40 yards of the Salient work before the formal Confederate surrender on July 4, 1863.

There was little time to celebrate their victory. The very next day, July 5, orders sent the Thirty-third Wisconsin on the march to Jackson, Mississippi in pursuit of Gen. Joseph E. Johnston. Having commenced siege operations around Jackson, the regiment was fortunate to miss the disastrous July 12 assault of the remainder of its brigade on the rebel works. With the Confederate evacuation of Jackson, the regiment tore up railroads, then returned to Vicksburg for garrison duty until August 18.

Higher command recognized the need for the Thirty-third Wisconsin to regain its health and recruit its ranks. Ordered to garrison duty at Natchez, Mississippi, the Badgers remained on duty throughout the autumn of 1863. In December, the regiment returned to Vicksburg, and remained in camp at Hebron Plantation, Mississippi until ordered to march as part of the campaign to destroy the vital rail center of Meridian, Mississippi, on February 3, 1864.

Marching in wintry weather without any shelter save greatcoats and rubber blankets, the Thirty-third Wisconsin destroyed miles of track, public stores, buildings, supplies, and equipage. On February 27, 1864, the regiment was singularly detached from the expedition to destroy a Confederate pontoon bridge at Madisonville, Mississippi. The expedition concluded on March 3, 1864, and the worn, ragged soldiers enjoyed a brief respite at their familiar camp at Hebron Plantation.

In early March, Major Horatio H. Virgin, in temporary command of the regiment, oversaw the refit of the Thirty-third with Springfield rifle-muskets and new accouterment. From March 10 - May 24, 1864, the Thirty-third Wisconsin participated in the Red River Campaign. The Badgers were part of a detachment from General Sherman's army, composed of two divisions of XVI Corps and one division of XVII Corps- all under the overall command of Brig. Gen. Andrew Jackson Smith. After the expedition against Fort DeRussy on March 14, the division of the XVII Corps (to which the Thirty-third Wisconsin belonged) was detached to guard Admiral Porter's fleet while Gen. Nathaniel Banks took the remainder of the army overland in his quest to take Shreveport, Louisiana. Missing the disastrous battles that befell Banks at Sabine Cross Roads and Pleasant Hill, the Thirty-third Regiment helped cover Bank's retreat south to Alexandria and Simmesport . Torching many of the homes and countryside as they

withdrew, shocked eastern troops immediately dubbed Smith's western soldiers "Smith's Thieves" and "Smith's Ragged Guerrillas." The Thirty-third Wisconsin participated in battles at Pleasant Hill Landing, Cloutierville, Monnett's Ferry at Cane River, Marksville, and Yellow Bayou. On May 22, 1864, the regiment embarked on steamer Madison for Vicksburg.

Supplemental orders dashed remaining hope that the regiment would rejoin the XVII Corps and Sherman's army, then on active campaign in northern Georgia. The Thirty-third Wisconsin soon found itself back in Memphis. By the end of June, the Wisconsin men were on the march as part of Gen. A. J. Smith's advance against Nathan Bedford Forrest in northern Mississippi. Confederate troops under Generals Lee and Forrest labored to lure Smith into a trap near Okolona, Mississippi. Smith eluded Forrest's trap and instead marched east toward the rail junction at Tupelo, Mississippi. On July 13, Forrest's ranging cavalry attempted to interdict Smith's wagon train at Barrow's Shop east of Pontotoc and six miles west of the ancient Camargo Crossroads. Routing the train guards, the Confederate horsemen gained a portion of the trains before the Thirty-third Wisconsin was brought up from rear-guard duty, and shot apart the daring Confederates with close-range musketry. A trophy battle-flag of the 8th Mississippi Cavalry Regiment (the former 19th Mississippi Cavalry Battalion) left on the field was snatched by a captain in the 14th Wisconsin, although contemporary accounts agree that the flag was the rightful trophy of the Thirty-third Wisconsin.

The next day, the regiment beat back three separate charges on the fields near Harrisburg, Mississippi, then swept the field in a counter-charge. The march resumed on July 15, with a skirmish near Old Town Creek. The heat felled many officers and men in the Thirty-third Wisconsin. Total casualties for the regiment in this expedition included: six killed, two officers (Lieut. Col. Lovell and Captain Pardon Swift) and thirty-four men wounded.

Returning to Memphis, the regiment embarked on steamer Rose Hambilton on August 3, 1864 for St. Charles, Arkansas, on the White River. Here, the Wisconsin men performed fatigue and garrison duty for one month. In September, orders directed that the Thirty-third participate in the Federal pursuit of Confederate forces under Confederate General Sterling Price. Commencing on September 17, the regiment tramped through Arkansas and Missouri as they searched for Price. The regiment completed a tramp of about 325 miles in 19 days, which left hundreds of the men barefoot. The regiment then was directed to St. Louis, where it guarded prisoners from the Union victory at Westport (including two Confederate generals), received new clothing, and settled into quarters at Jefferson Barracks and Benton Barracks. By the end of November, the regiment embarked for the city of Nashville.

At Nashville, the Thirty-third Wisconsin participated in fatigue duty until the general assault ordered against Confederate General John B. Hood's Army of the Tennessee on December 15. Striking Hood's strong points on his western flank, the regiment overran Confederate soldiers of Mannigault's Brigade stationed behind a low stone wall along the Hillsboro turnpike. Skirmishers from Company "A" captured a cannon, while other "A"

skirmishers plus the balance of the regiment captured 600 prisoners (official sources later credited the regiment with only a portion of this figure.) Bivouacked in the field that night, the Thirty-third Wisconsin was directed to a reserve position in support of XXIII Corps during the next day's action. Shortly afterward, the Badgers struck out on the march in pursuit of Hood, an operation that lasted until December 28, 1864.

In winter quarters at Eastport, Mississippi until February 1865, orders sent the regiment to New Orleans on February 6, 1865. Camping on the Plains of Chalmette, the original battlefield of the Jackson's 1815 victory, the Thirty-third Wisconsin was thereafter actively engaged in siege operations at Mobile Bay. Part of the investment of Spanish Fort (south of Fort Blakely), the regiment suffered casualties from sharpshooters and mortar fire, one shell of which severed the legs of a black cook in Company "H" and wounded dozens of others. The Thirty-third Wisconsin took part in the assault on Spanish Fort on the evening of April 8-9, 1865. General Christopher C. Andrews in his definitive book on the campaign for Mobile credited the Thirty-third Regiment as being the first regiment to enter the works of "Old Spanish Fort" on the heels of the evacuating Confederates. The fall of Fort Blakely on April 9 sealed the doom of Mobile and its defenders. The events at Appomattox Court House, Va. generally overshadowed the Federal capture of Spanish Fort and Fort Blakely and the subsequent fall of Mobile.

The Thirty-third Wisconsin then engaged in occupation duty at Mobile, Alabama until April 12, then similar duty at Montgomery and Tuskegee until July 1865. The Wisconsin men moved to Vicksburg July 23-31 by rail and steamboat, where the regiment mustered out August 8, 1865. Orders transferred late enlistees and recruits to other Wisconsin regiment, notably the 11th Wisconsin, to serve out their enlistments.

Commanded at muster-out by Lieutenant Colonel Virgin, the regiment lost 3 officers, 30 enlisted men killed or mortally wounded; 2 officers 167 enlisted men lost by disease (Dyer's Compendium," Vol. 2, p. 1687). A grateful War Department promoted both Jonathan Moore and Frederick Lovell to Brigadier General by brevet for meritorious service. Similarly, Horatio Virgin received promotion to full Colonel by brevet for meritorious service. Several captains received promotion to Major by brevet for meritorious service. Official sources credited the Thirty-third Wisconsin with numerous battle honors, the capture of several hundred prisoners, and at least six artillery pieces seized at actions at Nashville and Spanish Fort.

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