

THOMAS E. GROGAN
PVT., U.S. ARMY, CIVIL WAR

By Bobbi Sullivan

His name was Thomas E. Grogan. At 32 years of age, on the 11th of June 1862 he enlisted in the 162nd N.Y. Volunteer Infantry, 3rd Regiment, Metropolitan Guard, Co. E. He was mustered in as a private. He was my great-grandfather and I have the journal of his war experiences which he kept throughout his enlistment. His journal is old, difficult to read, some pages in bits and pieces and grammatically incorrect in parts. Even so, I feel very fortunate to have part of his story and throughout my reading; I have grown close to this very honorable man who I am proud to call “family”.

His first entry in his journal states that he remembers well the night he left, “it was wet on a stormy night that I left my wife and 4 small children, bidding them good-bye, the eldest being 7 years”. He was stationed at Rikers Island (now a N.Y.C prison) for 2 months.

On the 15th of August in that year, they traveled by rail to Philadelphia, then Baltimore and then on to Alexandria, La. where they stayed for 2 weeks. They were kept on board a transport for several weeks at Fort Monroe. His journal states that they “had to lie like spoons we were so short of room waiting to start with General Banks expedition for New Orleans”. They finally arrived at Camp Parapet in New Orleans in November. They spent New Year’s Day 1863 at Plaquemine Bayou. Torn journal pages prevent us from knowing what battles in which Thomas’s regiment was involved at that time, but they had left New Orleans and when they arrived back, the rest of the regiment was glad to see them, for they were told that they were all killed.

Thomas then remained in New Orleans until February 1863 when they were ordered to Baton Rouge to meet up with General Nathaniel P. Banks. Thomas speaks of General Banks as a good man – but “not a very good general”. On the 10th of March, 1863 they got orders to go to Port Hudson. There they were kept all that night under arms and the next day they marched 25 miles on “very bad” roads. “Some parts of the road we would be to our knees in mud and dirt. Other parts would burn our feet or warm our coffee, but we had none.” It was on the 14th of March when Thomas witnessed the ammunition ship, USS Mississippi going aground and being blown up by her own crew to save her from being taken by the rebels.

Thomas’ regiment left New Orleans on April 7 to Algiers and then on to Berwick City. They faced a few encounters from the Rebels and they remained there until there was an order for volunteers to go to Port Hudson. They were commanded by Major Bogart of New York. Thomas writes that he was “enjoying a good supper of hot soup when a dispatch came to us that 5,000 Rebels was coming down on us”. They had to leave all their clothes and 25,000 rounds of ammunition. With the “Rebels in hot pursuit after us”, they traveled 3 miles to get on board of a gun boat. “We had but 3 companies of our regiment against 3,000 to which we learned on the next morning that we took prisoners”. Thomas was wounded on the 19th of May, 1863 – a flesh wound, he called it. “But the ball was in my face 5 days while I was coming from B (sic) to New Orleans, when I got better and wanted to go back for there was some of my regiments going back after them. But the doctor said I could not stand the climate and that he would send me home.” It was in August 1863 that Thomas Grogan received his first discharge.

Thomas’ journal continues on his way home when he meets up with a wounded soldier who “had no one to help him, he could not lift himself or turn on the bench but with the help of a kind hand. I thought it my duty to attend on him to which I did till I left the Soldiers Home where the poor fellow died”.

In March 1864, Thomas Grogan re-enlisted for a second tour of duty.

Thomas' next entry into his journal was from Ft. Clifton, Va., a Confederate stronghold guarding Petersburg against union attack. Federal gunboats attacked the fort and during the engagement, Ft. Clifton artillery disabled the army gunboat Samuel L. Brewster with a shot to her boiler. Of May 9, 1864, Thomas writes, "that made her boiler explode and scaled several of her crew. The poor fellows could do nothing but jump overboard where there was rebels sharp shooters to pick them down. This was all in our view but could do nothing for them. We fought them all day but could do nothing, for they had the best of us."

From Ft. Clifton, they sailed up the James River and arrived at City Point, Va. on August 5. They were on their way to Petersburg until "General Butler came along side of us with orders not go any further than the Point of Rocks till further orders to which we obeyed". Thomas writes that they were unwilling to obey but did so anyway.

On December 10, 1864 he was aboard a transport heading for Ft. Fisher, NC. "we were taken from our own boats and put aboard of the Empire City to load 1600 colored men". He reports that the transport was not very large and it had 12 horses aboard. On Christmas day 1864 as Thomas watches a fleet of ships he writes, "have to brag of our fleet for there never was, never a finer fleet. Together, it did us good to see our noble flag float over our noble ships with our brave men to protect them. It was a noble sight for us." He continues his notes, "on board of our boat we had tobacco we had to smoke, we had to eat our pork raw, we could not cook our coffee. But most times there was but one galley for 1700 men so that was too small a pot for so large a family".

Thomas' final entry was in January 1865, from "Butler's Gap" (Dutch Gap, Va.) when he briefly writes of a 5-hour engagement with the Rebels.

There is no information regarding Thomas' last discharge date, but he eventually did go home to Brooklyn, NY. He and Mary had their fifth child, Joseph, in 1870 and he finally received his Civil War pension on July 18, 1892. Thomas died sometime between 1892 and 1900. I for one am very happy that this proud, principled and patriotic man lived through the devastation and horror of the Civil War, as Joseph their fifth and last child was my grandfather.

Editor's note – Bobbi Sullivan is a BCWRT member.