

Submission for “Gallery, Faces of an Era”

NAME: James Thomas Alcorn

DATES: Born January 28, 1838. Died November 7, 1870

ALLEGIANCE: Union

HIGHEST RANK: Battalion Quartermaster Sergeant

UNITS: First Indiana Volunteer Cavalry Regiment, Company C until August 23, 1864. Company B, First Indiana Veteran Cavalry Regiment from August 24, 1864 until July 1, 1865.

SERVICE RECORD: Enlisted in Company C, First Indiana Cavalry July 11, 1861 with the rank of Corporal. Was mustered in at Evansville, Indiana with the Regiment on August 11, 1861. Remarks in his service record state he “furnished his own horse and horse equipment for which he is entitled to 40 cents per day for use of same.” Promoted to Sergeant January 15, 1862 and to Company Quartermaster Sergeant in November of 1863. Battalion Quartermaster Sergeant January of 1864 and Detachment Quartermaster Sergeant January of 1864 and Detachment Quartermaster Sergeant in February of 1864. Re-enlisted as a Veteran Volunteer with the Rank of Quartermaster Sergeant on March 20, 1864 at Kennersville, Louisiana. Service record states he was “entitled to bounty as a veteran volunteer and furnished horse and horse equipment.” Transferred to Company B, First Indiana Cavalry on August 23, 1864 and listed as missing in action on September 11, 1864 near Pine Bluff, Arkansas. The next entry corrects this to “Prisoner of War taken near Pine Bluff in a skirmish with the enemy September 11, 1864.” He appears again on the muster roll of Company B at DeValls Bluff, Arkansas on June 22, 1865 and was entitled to three months extra pay for being a prisoner of war for 8 months. He was mustered out of the First Indiana Veteran Cavalry Regiment on July 1, 1865 at Indianapolis, Indiana.

James Thomas Alcorn was born on the farm of his father and grandfather in northern Posey County, Indiana on January 28, 1838. His grandfather, Thomas Alcorn Sr., moved to Indiana from Kentucky in 1811 and was a veteran of the War of 1812.

James Thomas Alcorn’s mother died in 1841 and his father died in 1858. His father had married for the second time in 1843 and had had 4 children by that union so at the beginning of the Civil War James Thomas owned the farm and was supporting his step mother and half brothers and sisters. He turned over those duties to his oldest step brother and enlisted in Company C of the First Indiana Cavalry Regiment. This Company was made up of northern Posey County men and was commanded by Captain John K Highman. James Thomas sent money back to his step mother to help support the family until her marriage to Charles Bellis in November of 1862.

Eight Companies of the First Indiana left Evansville, Indiana on August 21, 1861 for St. Louis, Missouri where they were immediately assigned to a position near Ironton in that state. Their first action was on September 12th near Black River where the enemy lost several killed and wounded. Shortly after this skirmish the regiment went to Pilot Knob

and on October 1, 1861 it participated in the battle of Fredericktown where the regiment, led by Company C, charged and completely routed the enemy. Captain Highman was killed during this charge and 1st Lieutenant Josiah Forth took over command of the Company.

James Thomas and his Company engaged in a number of skirmishes and battles in both Missouri and Arkansas and participated in campaigns in Mississippi until February of 1863 when Company C was transferred to the 12th Division of the 13th Corps of Grants Army of the Tennessee.

Brigadier General Alvin P. Hovey commanded the 12th Division and had asked for Company C as his headquarters escort. As the General was also from Posey County, Indiana it was natural that he would want men he knew and trusted near him.

James Thomas and his Company saw action with the 12th Division during all its operations in the Vicksburg campaign. Company C was on a scout near Champion's Hill when they spotted the advancing army of Confederate General Pemberton as it moved east from Vicksburg. They were able to give General Hovey some advance warning so that he could prepare to meet and stop Pemberton during the ensuing battle.

In August of 1863 Company C and James Thomas were transferred to New Orleans where they participated in the "Teche" campaign. After the completion of that campaign they were stationed in the defenses of New Orleans until August of 1864 when they were transferred back to the main body of the First Indiana Cavalry which was on station at Pine Bluff, Arkansas. As the enlistment period of 3 years was expiring the regiment was ordered back to Indiana the last part of that month to be mustered out.

James Thomas Alcorn had re-enlisted as a Veteran Volunteer in March of 1864 in Kennersville, Louisiana so he stayed at Pine Bluff with the other veterans and the replacements who had more time to serve. The regiment had a strength of about 400 men and was divided into two Companies, A and B. James Thomas was assigned to Company B and was Quartermaster Sergeant for the unit.

During a skirmish with Confederate Cavalry near Pine Bluff, Arkansas on September 11, 1864, James Thomas Alcorn was captured by the enemy. He was part of a detachment consisting of 60 men of the Fifth Kansas, 30 men of the First Indiana and a howitzer with gun crew of the First Indiana. This detachment was under the command of Major Thomas W. Scudder of the Fifth Kansas Cavalry. The unit was attacked from all sides and had to retreat saving the howitzer with great difficulty. James Thomas was taken by the Confederates to Camp Ford located just north of Tyler, Texas where he sat out the rest of the war.

Upon his release from the prison camp and subsequent mustering out of the army, he returned to his farm in Indiana. He married Anna Boren in January of 1866 and they had three children: James Grant, David Colfax and Ada June. He continued to farm until his tragic, untimely death on November 7, 1870.

The following is a letter from James L. Alcorn, 541 Del Norte St., Denver, CO 80221-4118
Tel. # (303) 427-4303 dated February 15, 1998

Wanda Mattheus
4509 48th St.
Lubbock , TX 79414

Dear Cousin Wanda:

Thank you very much for the information on your family, it has helped me in completing my ancestor file on the Arja Thomas Alcorn family.

You mentioned in your letter that you were interested in our Great Grand Father James Thomas Alcorn and his Civil War Service. I was able to secure his service records and pension records from the National Archives about seven years ago. Since that time I have worked with the "Official Records of the War of the Rebellion," a "History of Posey County Indiana," "Indiana in the Civil War," and his own small notebook which has enabled me to piece together about a 20 some page narrative of his life. I am enclosing a capsulated version of that narrative which I submitted to "The Civil War Times Illustrated" for publication in one of their feature sections. He was a remarkable man and I would consider him a real American hero. I do not know if you know this but he committed suicide in November of 1870 by slashing his throat three times with a razor. His suicide note said he had a terrible pain in his head for the last twelve years which had grown steadily worse in recent months and that he could not continue to live with the pain. He told his wife Anna "Boren" Alcorn that he loved her and the children and that she was the best wife a man could have. His children: our grandfather James Grant, David Colfax, and Ada Jane. My study of his Civil War history makes it abundantly clear why he used the middle names of Grant and Colfax for his sons. He served under Grant's command up until August of 1863 and his service in the 12th Divisions Headquarters Guard would have brought him into close contact with the General. All his campaigns under Grant were successful which was not the case after he and his Company C were assigned to other Generals. Schyler Colfax was Grant's Vice President after the war during Grant's two terms as President of the United States which explains how that name came into the Alcorn family.

Also enclosed are a number of charts I have run from my computer program after entering the information I received from you. I hope it will be of some interest to you and if you find any errors or additions to the information please let me know so that I can correct the data.

Thank you again for your help. I plan to visit your parents and Lloyd and Elsie again this year. Maybe I will get lucky and be there when you are there. Was pleased to be able to meet Bette Sue last October while in Plainview.

Sincerely, James L. Alcorn