

James K. Robson, Soldier, Civil War Diary, 1862 A&M 3775

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Abstract

Civil War diary of ca. 160 pages kept by Private James K. Robson of the New York 8th Cavalry, Company E, for the year 1862. Though diary entries are short, they are pithy and informative for every day of the year, documenting highlights from the perspective of an army private. The diary begins with a description of guard duties and camp life in the vicinity of Washington, D.C. (January to March), and activities during the Valley Campaign guarding the railroad and Harpers Ferry from Thomas Jackson's army (March to June). Robson's unit was then withdrawn to Relay House near Baltimore to be mounted, fully equipped, and drilled as a cavalry unit (June to August), and subsequently deployed to the defense of Harpers Ferry in response to the invasion of Maryland by Confederate forces during the Antietam Campaign (September). Sick in the hospital, Robson was among the 12,000 Union soldiers who surrendered at Harpers Ferry, and then paroled with nine others of his unit to Camp Douglas near Chicago, Illinois (September to November). After his exchange he ended the year at Fort Albany within the Washington, D.C. fortification system.

Creator

Robson, James K.

Extent

0.1 Linear Feet Summary: 1/2 in. (ca. 160 pages)

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Repository

West Virginia and Regional History Center

Administrative Information

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Biographical / Historical

James K. Robson was born ca. 1832. He enlisted at Hartland, New York on 9 October 1861. Promoted to Full Corporal, he was discharged on 8 December 1864 at Rochester, New York.

Scope and Contents

Civil War diary of ca. 160 pages kept by Private James K. Robson of the New York 8th Cavalry, Company E, for the year 1862. Though diary entries are short, they are pithy and informative for every day of the year, documenting highlights from the perspective of an army private.

Initially stationed outside Washington, D.C. protecting approaches to the city (January - March), his unit was transferred to meet the threat of Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson during his Valley Campaign (March - June). Robson's unit was then withdrawn to Relay House near Baltimore to be mounted, fully equipped, and drilled as a cavalry unit (June to August), and subsequently deployed to the defense of Harpers Ferry in response to the invasion of Maryland by Confederate forces during the Antietam Campaign (September). Sick in the hospital, Robson was among the 12,000 Union soldiers who surrendered at Harpers Ferry on 15 September, and then paroled with nine others of his unit to Camp Douglas near Chicago, Illinois (September to November). After his exchange he ended the year at Fort Albany within the Washington, D.C. fortification system (November to December).

Entries of note include references to baseball games in the month of April, and a record of activities as a paroled soldier at Camp Douglas near Chicago, Illinois in the period September to November. On the inside of the front cover Robson recorded "James K. Robson, Johnsons Creek, Niagara Co., N.Y." [Niagara County, New York]. He also wrote in the same location "Revolver No. 32926 belongs to James K. Robson." The last pages in the diary include a "roll" [or "muster roll"] of Company E created by Robson.

The following is a selection of entries transcribed from the diary. It reads: "...

[1/5/1862] McMillan was court-martialed...

[1/10] A soldier was sentenced to carry a stick of wood in front of the guard house for being saucy...

[1/20] Rec'd our first pay from the government pretty lively times around the sutlers setting up accounts...

[1/21] Brown and Achilles went to the city and bought [Company 'E' 1st Lieutenant Alpha] Whitons sword...

[1/22] Presentation of Whiton's sword...

[1/26] Our company did guard duty...Several soldiers ran away down town and got put in the guard house at night...

[1/28] Fixed the Capt's tent. [KIA at Broad Run, Virginia 10/15/1863, 1st Sgt later 1st Lt. Carlos S.P.] Smith sewed on his stripes...

[2/15] Our Co. did guard duty...Caught one prisoner...

[2/18] Rec'd our scales...

[2/19] sewed on my scales...Col. S. J. Cooks sent in his resignation...

[2/25] Our co. did guard duty. Put one prisoner in the guard house. Took several bottles of whiskey...

[3/8] pulled up stakes for Edwards Ferry...

[3/12] Went down the canal watching secesh. Came in at dusk captured one boat...Sergt. Marvin died...

[3/20] Two men were here who fought at Balls Bluff belonging to the 71st Penn. names, Geo. Hooper and Frank Elliee...

[3/24] Report of a battle at Winchester, Union troops victorious...

[4/4] Our Co. on guard...My post was in the village, captured a soldier at night...

[4/13] Prepared to move towards Winchester. Started at noon and marched two miles beyond Charleston [Charles Town] (10 miles) to Cameron station...

[4/14] Marched to Wades Station the Headquarters of the 1st Maryland...

[4/15] Md. 1st left for their own state. One squad of our men detailed to guard the Opequon bridge in their place...

[4/16] Took the new Sharps Carbines and took a tramp to Brewston...

[4/19] Eighty Rebel prisoners passed here on their way to Baltimore...

[4/20] The 11th MD Cav came from Winchester to take our place...

[4/23] Played ball...

[4/24] Had a game of ball...Col. Babbits and Maj. Markell arrived...

[4/26] Had a game of ball...

[4/28] New Orleans taken according to report...

[5/4] Raised money for Lathrops Monument \$70 odd...

[5/16] Several Rebel prisoners passed here today...

[5/23] Jackson near Winchester, some fighting...

[5/25] Firing heard this morning in the vicinity of Winchester. A battle. Union troops defeated Winchester on fire. We retreated to Harpers Ferry laid on our arms on Bolivar Heights. Col. Babbit separated...

[5/26] Remained on the heights. The enemy advanced to Charlestown [Charles Town], some excitement laid on our arms again. Gen'l Saxon takes command...

[5/27] Enemy advancing on towards us. Union reinforcements amt 8 regiments...

[5/28] Formed a line of a battle on Bolivar Heights. Large rebel force within three miles. Hourly expecting attack. Our regt. was ordered upon the heights...

[5/29] No attack yet by the Rebs. General Cooper came. Some skirmishing out beyond the Heights with cavalry & artillery. Our troops threw some shells from MD Heights...

[5/30] We retreated across the river at 2 o'clock AM...the Rebels reported to be advancing with 40,000 men. Some fighting some shells from MD Heights...

[6/15] Twenty eight of us detailed to go to Charlestown [Charles Town] as Provost guards where we arrived early. Quarters in the Charlestown [Charles Town] Hotel...

[6/21] News came of Jackson's defeat. Federal forces arrived at the Ferry in large numbers, 10,000 militia...

[6/25] Took the cars 8 P.M. for Washington Junction [otherwise known as "Relay House", a station on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad near Baltimore] ...

[6/27] Sent my likeness [photograph] home...

[6/30] Several of the boys of different Co's were fined \$8 & 10 by the sentence of court martial...Recd our revolvers...

[7/14] Col. Davis takes command of the Regiment...

[7/23] Dagueriam [Daguerrean] car arrived in camp...

[7/24] Rec'd cartridge boxes for the revolvers...

[7/26] On guard. The prisoners swept the grounds...

[7/28] Attended the funeral of a soldier 60th NY. Geo. Skeelee arrested...

[7/30] Bill Fearby went to the Relay house to play for a dance...

[8/4] The prisoners sweeping. The sentences of 16 prisoners read at dress parade, including Geo. Skeelee...

[8/9] Funeral obsequies of Ex. President Van Buren were observed...

[8/15] P.S. Bates got a picture of a group of the boys and started for home...

[8/23] Capt. Dick returned. He is paroled...

[8/27] Practiced knocking false heads off the posts...

[8/30] Carried the horses saddles & other goods, which took all the day and evening. Started for Harpers Ferry about midnight...

[9/2] Detailed with 20 others to go to Winchester...Gen. Whites brigade was encamped there...

[9/3] Marched very early for Harpers Ferry a large force of rebels at Winchester...

[9/4] Went a scouting to Charlestown [Charles Town]. The rebels at that place in force. Their pickets fired on us. We returned to camp...

[9/5] Communication cut off at Point of Rocks. Rebels have possession there...

[9/6] Our Co. & Co. G started out on an expedition in the evening...

[9/11] The regt went up the valley all returned but our Co. which was left to watch the enemies movements...

[9/14] Company ordered to saddle but did not got out. Shelling from Loudon Heights by the Rebels was answered by shell from our side...

[9/15] Harpers Ferry retaken by the rebels, with 12 thousand prisoners. 9 of our Co. including myself also prisoner. All paroled but those in hospital...

[9/16] paroling continued and finished. The Rebel forces, artillery and baggage wagons came in during the night and today. The railroad bridge blowed up. Fighting in Maryland...

[9/17] Some of the convalescent ones went downtown to be passed out of the rebel lines, but got disappointed. Fighting in Md...

[9/18] Rebels passing to and fro, and some old Farmers hunting up slaves...pontoon bridge burned...

[9/19] Very few persons left in the place. Fighting in MD. Gen. Sigel reported close by. News of a great Union victory...

[9/20] No rebels in the place. Fighting in MD our troops are planting batteries on MD Heights...

[9/22] Union soldiers coming in to the Ferry fast, which proved to be McClellan's army...

[9/25] Started from Sandyhook [Sandy Hook] 2 P.M. Arrived at Anapolis [Annapolis] at 9 P.M. ...

[9/26] Took steamboat to Baltimore, arrived at 6. Walked to the depot and took the cars for Chicago. Rode all night...

[9/29] Arrived at Chicago about 2 P.M. Staid in camp in the fairgrounds...

[10/1] Came over to Camp Douglass [Camp Douglas] where the rest of the prisoners of our regt. were. Found several of my own Co. there...

[10/2] Paroled prisoners tore down the fence and run the guard...

[10/12] Had inspection by Gen. Tyler...

[10/13] Paroled prisoners commenced drilling...

[10/16] A fire occurred in camp, burning a long string of barracks...

[10/22] The 60th Regt. Ohio Vol put under arrest, officers and privates for not doing guard duty...

[11/13] Went to the circus...

[11/16] Report that Harpers Ferry prisoners would not be exchanged...

[11/18] Report that we are exchanged...

[11/26] Started for Washington taking 50 horses with us. Rode all night...

[11/27] Arrived in Toledo at 8 A.M. Stopped and had coffee. Changed cars...

[12/1] Arrived at W. [Washington] at 7 o'clock...

[12/4] Pitched our tents near fort Albany...

[12/6] Moved to fort Albany into log barracks...

[12/9] Bill Fearby rode my horse to Washington...

[12/24] Report that Maj. Markell has resigned...

[12/30] Lieut Legget arrived, Vanderhoof put on his straps..."

Keywords

Harpers Ferry (W. Va.)

Civil War - New York 8th Cavalry, Company E.

United States -- History -- Civil War, 1861-1865 -- Prisoners and prisons

Robson, James K.