

Augusta H. Heisey & the Civil War

by JOSEPH D. LOKAY

The Civil War started on April 12, 1861. On July 2, 1862, President Lincoln issued a second call for 300,000 additional troops for the Union Army. Pennsylvania's quota for this call was to supply 21 new regiments. The 155th Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers which came from Pittsburgh was one of these new regiments. The 155th was composed of 10 companies, A thru K (no J), and A. H. Heisey was part of Company C. By following the movements and actions of the 155th Regiment, we can follow the Civil War activities that involved A. H. Heisey through-out his military career.

John H. Cain & Lee Anshutz teamed together to recruit for and organize Company C. Recruiting officers for the 155th were opened in Pittsburgh in August 1862. Many young boys were recruited as over half of the recruits that joined the 155th were between the ages of 14 and 18. On August 21, 1862, Augustus H. Heisey, at the age of 20, was recruited by John Cain for a three year term in Company C of the 155th. Company C would eventually be composed of about 100 men. As the recruits were enlisted they were sent to Camp Howe, located at Pittsburgh, where they received their blue uniforms.

On formal organization, John Cain was commissioned as a Major in the 155th. For Company C, Lee Anshutz became Captain, James S. Palmer became First-Lieutenant, John T. Denniston became Second-Lieutenant and A. H. Heisey was made Orderly Sergeant, or sometimes called 1st Sergeant.

A. H. Heisey was there for the muster-in roll call on September 2, 1862. On Sept. 2, marching orders were received for the 155th to break camp and proceed to Washington, D.C., via train, where they were to eventually help check the advancing Southern Army. Upon arrival at Washington, the regiment was sent to Camp Chase on Arlington Heights where they received Springfield rifles from the Washington Arsenal.

On Sept. 14, 1862 the regiment received orders to march to Antietam. They arrived at Antietam battlefield on 9/18/62, one day after the main battle. There were many sights of the main battle as the regiments marched toward the Potomac River. These scenes were the first introduction the 155th Regiment had to real war.

The 155th served on picket duty along the Potomac for several weeks. Camp McAuley was the name given the bivouac occupied by the Regiment during that period. On October 30, 1862, orders were received to break camp and move on an active campaign against the enemy. The Potomac River was crossed at Harper's Ferry. The objective point for the Union Army was Fredericksburg.

Rumors circulated that a battle would soon take place as the army camped outside of Fredericksburg. The battle of Fredericksburg began on December 13, 1862. The 155th Regiment received its baptism of fire on December 13 as it participated in the great charge on Marye's Heights. Many were killed or wounded in this historic bayonet charge that lasted about 15 minutes. Captain Anshutz of Company C was killed in this action. Lieutenant J. S. Palmer assumed command of Company C during the remainder of the battle. The next morning the Union Army retreated from Fredericksburg back across the Rappahannock River to their former camp. The Confederate Army did not discover the retreat until late in the day.

J. S. Palmer was promoted to Captain of Company C, and Second Lieutenant Denniston was promoted to First-Lieutenant. Orderly-Sergeant Augustus H. Heisey, under whose discipline the raw material of the Company had been developed into trained soldiers, also received recognition, being advanced to Second Lieutenant. From here on, it is known that Second-Lieutenant Heisey frequently had to command Company C because of the sickness that later developed with Capt. Palmer and because of the absence of Lt. Denniston, who was called to help on detailed Regiment staff duty for several months.

The 155th remained on picket duty along the Rappahannock River till late April 1863. On April 7, 1863, President Lincoln visited the camp where he was given full review of all the Regiments. On April 30, the 155th once again crossed the Rappahannock, reaching Chancellorsville in the late morning of May 1, 1863.

The quick march had caught the Confederates by surprise. The 155th spent the early part of May 2 erecting earth works, rifle pits and other defenses. The battle of Chancellorsville started that day with heavy cannon fire. Later in the day, the 155th was given orders to move to the right of its position and assist in checking the attack of Stonewall Jackson's men on the Union position at that point. They were soon under fire and the position was held. Guns boomed all that night. It was this night that General "Stonewall" Jackson lost his life. The battle resumed May 3 with furious attacks by the Confederates. By May 4, the battle had declined to small skirmishes. On May 5, heavy rains came and since the river was beginning to rise with the potential of cutting off supplies, the 155th moved back across the Rappahannock River where they again remained on picket duty.

On June 3, the 155th began marching toward Washington D.C. With several rest stops along the way, the 155th force marched from their camp in Virginia, across Maryland, to Gettysburg, Pa, arriving there late on July 1, 1863. Cannon fire could be heard in the distance as the 155th approached. The battle of Gettysburg began early on July 1 when the Union and Confederate armies encountered each other just outside of town. They battled the entire day.

After just a few hours rest, the 155th joined in the battle at Gettysburg early on the morning of July 2, 1863. Many went into battle barefooted because of blistered and swollen feet from the long and fast forced march.

Gettysburg was a three day battle which ended on July 4 by the complete retreat of the Confederate forces. As we know, Gettysburg was one of the great battles of the Civil War. Gettysburg was the turning point for the Confederate Army.

In the early morning on July 2, the 155th was assigned a reserve position near the center and behind the Union corps of the previous days battle. They would be called in for any emergency when the enemy attacked, or to the relief of a threatened area. Soon an order was issued for the 155th to help in the battle taking place at the Peach Orchard. The Regiment participated in the storming and capture of Little Round Top. Little Round Top was under fire by the Confederate sharpshooters concealed in the rocks known as "Devil's Den." Piles of stones were assembled to protect themselves from the enemy. The 155th continued holding the top of Little Round Top on July 3 and 4. Early on the morning of July 5 it was discovered that Lee's Confederate army had retreated during the night. Today, the memorial monument at Gettysburg for the 155th Regiment stands on Little Round Top, the place they defended. Heisey's name, along with many others, is on the monument.

The Union army followed the Confederate army but no major battles took place till May 1864. The 155th spent the winter of 1863 camped at Warrenton Junction, Virginia.

Captain Palmer took sick leave in July 1863, and resigned from the army in August 1863 because of his sickness. In the Fall of 1863, Lt. Denniston was transferred to the General's staff for staff duty. This left Company C without a Captain for a short while. Lt. Heisey began to command Company C as an "acting" captain on about September 1, 1863.

A 10 day leave of absence was granted to A. H. Heisey in late January 1864 to visit his sister in Pittsburgh, Pa who was very sick. While Heisey was in Pittsburgh, he developed a case of nephritis and, per doctor's orders, was unable to return to the 155th winter quarters for several weeks. Heisey was granted a second leave of absence a year later in March 1865 to again visit his sister who was apparently dying at that time. I believe his sister was Heisey's only living relative in the U.S.

On May 1, 1864, marching orders were issued and the 155th left its winter quarters. By May 4th, they were camped on the edge of the area called the Wilderness. On May 5th, they participated in the battle at Wilderness, Va. On May 7th, the 155th moved to Spottsylvania where they participated in the battle of Spottsylvania on May 12. After many days of skirmishing, the 155th made a general assault on Cold Harbor on June 2, 1864.

On June 17th near Petersburg, the 155th led by Captain McKee of Company I was ordered to carry out a bayonet charge on the enemy. The loss in this charge was heavy. A. H. Heisey, the boy acting Captain of the Regiment, took command of the charging column when Captain McKee was killed. Captain Heisey received commendations for his courage throughout this action. For the next 7 months, the 155th participated in the siege on Richmond and Petersburg, Virginia.

On October 3, 1864, Lt. Heisey, who had long commanded the Company, was officially promoted to Captain of Company C. He held this rank until he mustered out with the Regiment on June 2, 1865.

Marching orders were received on February 5, 1865 and on Feb. 6th, the 155th fought a small battle at Dabney's Mill. On March 25th, the 155th participated in the second battle of Hatcher's Run. The enemy retreated later that day. On March 29th, the 155th initiated a new campaign, which later proved to be the beginning of the end. A short skirmish was fought at Lewis Farm. Many small skirmishes were fought by the 155th leading up to the last battle at Five Forks that started on April 1, 1865. The fall of Petersburg and Richmond and the loss of the battle at Five Forks eventually led the Confederate army to surrender on April 9, 1865. The 155th was among the Regiments selected to receive the Surrender at Appomattox Court House, Virginia. On April 12, 1865, to complete the surrender, the 155th also participated in the receiving of the guns from the Confederate army.

After a grand review of the army at Washington, D.C., the 155th was ordered to report to Pittsburgh for final pay and muster-out. On June 8, 1865, the men received their accrued wages and discharge papers. At this final moment, Captain Heisey, surrounded by the men of his command, received many expressions of good will and esteem.

Much of the information in this article was taken from the book "Under the Maltese Cross", a history of the Pennsylvania 155th Regiment by J.T. Porter published in 1910. My thanks to Paul Fairall for his lead to this book.