

The 63rd Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment

The 63rd Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment formally came into existence on December 31, 1861, when recruiting camps were established at Covington (Fountain County) and Haubstadt (Gibson County). The initial commandant of the Covington camp was James McMannomy, who was instrumental in forming the regiment and recruiting in the Covington area. Most expected him to become the regiment's commander, but John S. Williams of Lafayette was able to win that position by hard politicking (promoted to Lieutenant Colonel).

The regiment recruited the first few months of 1862 until a War Department order halted all recruiting of volunteers. The partial companies were consolidated into four full companies which were sent to Lafayette to guard prisoners captured at Forts Henry and Donelson. After about a month the "battalion" was sent to Indianapolis to act as provost guards. They guarded prisoners at Camp Morton and kept order in the city.

In the summer of 1862 the battalion was sent to Alexandria, Virginia and served as part of Washington's defense force. In August they were assigned to Piatt's brigade and were involved in the last day of the battle of Second Manassas. The battalion suffered about a dozen casualties and was part of the great "skedaddle" from the field at the end of the day. A few weeks later the battalion was sent back to Indiana to finish recruiting up to regiment strength.

While the first four companies were away in Virginia, James McMannomy and others had continued to recruit for the regiment in Indiana. By September 1862 the regiment was near full strength. About 40-50% of the regiment came from Fountain County. Other counties contributing sizable contingents included Gibson, White, Hamilton, Marion, and Tippecanoe. John S. Williams was promoted to Colonel, James McMannomy was made Lieutenant Colonel, and Israel Newton Stiles of Lafayette was made Major. Stiles had previously served in the Peninsula Campaign with the 20th Indiana.

In December, 1862, the regiment was split into two battalions. Six companies under Lt. Col. McMannomy were sent to guard the railroads south of Louisville, Kentucky. They would remain there until early 1864. Other than minor encounters with guerrillas (one group stole the Chaplain's horse), their sole combat was a brush with Morgan's Raid in the summer of that year. Some members of the 63rd fought a brief skirmish with Morgan's Raiders south of Shepherdsville, claiming to have killed three of Morgan's men. Morgan then turned west to cross into Indiana. During this period McMannomy was promoted to Colonel upon the resignation of Williams. McMannomy would himself resign in January, 1864, for health reasons.

The other four companies served as provost guards in Indianapolis. They ran the Soldier's Home and sometimes provided guards for Camp Morton. They also acted as the Governor's enforcers, and some companies were involved in the so-called "Battle of Pogue's Run" during the Democratic Convention in May of 1863. Contingents of the 63rd also went out to places like Lafayette to arrest people labeled as subversive by the Morton administration.

In January, 1864 the regiment rendezvoused at Camp Nelson, Kentucky. It was there that McMannomy passed the command to Israel Newton Stiles. In March the regiment marched to Knoxville, Tennessee, using pack mules and making its own trails over the Cumberland Plateau. There it formally joined the 23rd Corps of the Army of the Ohio, which it would serve under until the end of the war. The regiment only stayed in Knoxville for a single night before passing east up the Tennessee Valley. The division, commanded by General Jacob D. Cox (of Ohio), moved up the valley to Jonesborough, then destroyed the railroad track as they moved back toward Knoxville.

As soon as they finished that duty they took trains south to Cleveland, Tennessee, then marched to Red Clay, Georgia. They were now part of Sherman's army group for the campaign to take Atlanta. Their first skirmishes were on the east side of Rocky Face Ridge in early May, 1864. The regiment then participated in the flanking move through Snake Creek Gap aimed at forcing Johnson from Dalton, leading to the Battle of Resaca. During the first day of the battle the 63rd was the right flank regiment of a divisional attack that succeeded in taking some Confederate earthworks northwest of Resaca. In the three hour long fight the 63rd lost over 110 men killed and wounded, their single worst day of the war. In the end the division had to withdraw from a lack of ammunition.

The 63rd was heavily engaged throughout the Atlanta Campaign, often swinging from flank to flank as the small Army of Ohio was used to probe for weaknesses in Johnson's defenses. They seem to have often been deployed as skirmishers, though that might have been typical for Western regiments at this stage of the war. Battles they fought in included the fighting around Dallas and a flanking movement around the Kennesaw Mountain position. They were in the first brigade to cross the Chattahoochee River, wading across on a submerged dam. The 63rd was part of the movement around the west side of Atlanta, and was one of the first units to reach the Macon Railroad at Rough and Ready Station, causing Hood to abandon Atlanta at the end of August.

The 63rd spent much of September, 1864, in reserve at Decatur, Georgia. The regiment had started the Atlanta Campaign with over 700 men, and now numbered less than 300 effectives. Most losses were from disease. In October they were once again on the move, pursuing Hood's army northward through the old battlefields of the summer. Nearly constant marching took them into Alabama and then back to Dalton, Georgia. There they were entrained for Nashville, Tennessee, sent to aid Thomas instead of participating in Sherman's March to the Sea.

As part of the 23rd Corps, the 63rd went to Pulaski, Tennessee via Nashville, Franklin, and Columbia. When Hood began his final offensive northward in November they found themselves racing to Columbia, losing several men keeping Forrest from cutting off the Army of the Ohio. They were part of the fateful night march north past Spring Hill, and were among the first Union troops into Franklin. During the Battle of Franklin the 63rd defended the far left of the Union line, facing repeated attacks by the men of Stewart's Corps. In December the regiment participated in the attack on Hood that destroyed his army at Nashville.

During the pursuit the regiment was directed to the Tennessee River where they took ship for the east, eventually reaching Alexandria again in January, 1865. During this period Col. Stiles was promoted to Brigadier General, and Lt. Col. Daniel Morris (of Covington) commanded the regiment. From there they sailed to Federal Point, North Carolina, south of Wilmington, arriving at Fort Fisher shortly after its capture. They were involved in the attempt to turn General Hoke's defenses on Federal Point before being shipped across the Cape Fear River to Smithville. The 63rd led the advance to Fort Anderson, and were some of the first troops into that fortification when it was abandoned. They fought their way northward to the outskirts of Wilmington and were briefly stationed there after its capture. The regiment advanced northward with its division to Kingston through very swampy terrain, then advanced on to Goldsboro and the link up with Sherman's army. They eventually marched through Greensboro and had reached Raleigh when the war ended. The first four companies mustered out in May, 1865, the rest of the regiment in June.

According to Dyer's Compendium, the regiment lost 3 officers and 53 enlisted men killed or mortally wounded in battle. Another 2 officers and 130 men died of disease, for a total of 188 lost out of just over 1,000 men who served. A regimental veteran estimated they had covered nearly 9,000 miles: 1,700 marching, 5,000 by railroad, and 2,300 by boat. Most of those miles came in 1864 and 1865.