

JEFFERSON GREEN FIELDS IN THE CIVIL WAR



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On March 20, 1862, in Memphis, Tennessee, Jefferson Green Fields was signed by Captain James A. Wiggs to a three-year enlistment as a private in the Confederate Artillery. Just a month earlier, the Union had scored its first major victories at Forts Henry and Donelson, breaking the Confederate defensive line in Tennessee.

Wiggs' company, originally organized in Memphis a year earlier, joined nine others at Fort Pillow, Tennessee and on May 10 formed the 1st Tennessee Heavy Artillery Regiment. Captain Wiggs and his men were designated Company D. In command of the regiment was Colonel Andrew Jackson, Jr. Confederate records indicate that Colonel Jackson was an effective and well-respected officer.¹

ARTILLERY IN THE CIVIL WAR

The Civil War was the first conflict in which artillery was recognized as a separate division of the army, in addition to infantry and cavalry. Heavy artillery regiments, such as the 1st Tennessee, were not named for their weaponry but rather by function. Properly called foot artillery, heavy artillery units were sometimes described as siege or garrison artillery. As such, heavy artillery units were assigned to seacoast, river, garrison and mountain action, primarily defense.²

The color red was linked to artillery, as light blue was to infantry and yellow to cavalry. Enlisted men such as J.G. Fields often wore shell jackets trimmed with red tape along with slouch hats, kepis or forage hats decorated with red hat cords or bands (see illustrations, Attachment A). The badge for the artillery consisted of crossed cannons. Enlisted men wore crossed cannons in brass on their hats, with a brass number designating their regiment and a letter designating their battery.

¹ Jefferson Green Fields obviously held his commanding officer in high regard, naming his next born son Andrew Jackson Fields.

² Light, or field, artillery had two components. In field artillery units that served with cavalry, all men rode horses, and were thus known as horse artillery. In units that accompanied infantry, only drivers and officers had horses, and such units were known as mounted artillery.

The term artillery automatically brings to mind cannons and thereby cannoneers. Each battery had its respective officers, and many other positions necessary to support an artillery unit. Jefferson Green Fields was a teamster,³ not a surprising occupation considering his age (about 42) and the fact that he operated a livery stable after the war. In *Field Artillery Battery Positions and Duties*, R. B. Hansen describes the duties of privates in the position of teamsters or wagoneers:⁴

Were under the direction of the QM [quartermaster] sergeant and were assigned to drive and care for the baggage wagons (normally two), forage wagons, and sometimes an ambulance. Most of these men were paid an extra rate equal to that of a corporal's pay. These men were considered important not just because they looked after the baggage, but they guarded it with zeal from other troops and commands. Forage and corn for the horses were a much sought after commodity - sometimes by starving infantrymen. Under their care were the wagon teams of either two or four animals, usually mules, and their harness. On the march they were in rear of the battery and sometimes in rear of the army in the baggage train. Also, these men and the extras handled and cared for the extra horses belonging to the battery. Normally a battery would have from four to eight men detailed to this duty; sometimes it was rotated, but often not. Often the teamsters were detailed to the battalion or brigade quartermaster, especially in the later part of the conflict. Many times these men were railed as shirkers from the fighting part of the army. In part this was true, but they performed a valuable service and most did their duty to the end, and even though they did not relish front line positions, they contributed.

Pay for privates was \$11 per month, for corporals, \$13. Soldiers were to be paid every other month, but payment in the Confederate army was often slow and irregular.⁵

³ J.G. Field [sic] was identified as a "Teamster for Ordnance Dept." on the Roll of Prisoners of War paroled at Vicksburg, Mississippi.

⁴ Duties for heavy artillery teamsters are assumed to have been similar to those for field artillery.

⁵ As an example, in March and April 1863, J.G. Fields appeared on a hospital muster roll, which indicated that he had been last paid through October 31, 1862.

THE BATTLE OF VICKSBURG

On June 2, 1862 the 1st Tennessee Heavy Artillery Regiment boarded the steamer *Golden Age* for Vicksburg, Mississippi. Both the Union and the Confederacy recognized the importance of Vicksburg, a city built on a high bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. Jefferson Davis called Vicksburg “the nailhead that [holds] the South’s two halves together,” and according to Abraham Lincoln, “. . . Vicksburg is the key. The war can never be brought to a close until the key is in our pocket.”

Whether headed to nailhead or key, the 1st Tennessee Heavy Artillery Regiment arrived at Vicksburg and on June 18 was placed under the command of Brigadier General M.L. Smith, who consolidated the regiment into four companies. Companies D, E and F formed Co. D under Captain John P. Postlethwaite. Jefferson Green Fields was promoted to 2nd corporal during the reorganization.

Colonel Edward Higgins, commander of River Defenses, placed the 1st Tennessee Heavy Artillery Regiment in charge of the upper batteries. The upper batteries ran from Fort Hill to the upper bayou.⁶ Three additional artillery units were attached to Colonel Jackson’s regiment -- Caruther’s Tennessee Battery, Johnston’s Tennessee Battery, and Lynch’s Tennessee Battery.⁷ On June 28 and again from July 12 - 27 the regiment was engaged in heavy bombardment.

Meanwhile, back in the Union, Abraham Lincoln ordered General Ulysses S. Grant, the victor at Fort Donelson, to take Vicksburg. In December, as Grant moved his troops toward Vicksburg, General William Tecumseh Sherman attacked at Chicasaw Bluffs (see map, Attachment B), but Pemberton’s men prevailed. By the end of January 1863, General Grant and 45,000 of his men reached Young’s Point, 20 miles north of Vicksburg across the Mississippi River. Grant was turned back in several efforts to move his army through the bayous to seize bluffs north and south of the city.

By March, Grant decided to change his tactics. Although it meant leading his troop into a battle with no means to receive either supplies or reinforcements, he resolved to march downriver, cross the Mississippi River south of Vicksburg, then

⁶ The center batteries were immediately on the city front; the lower batteries defended the river south of the city.

⁷ In July 1862 the regiment reported 16 officers, 153 men present for duty, 284 present, 330 present and absent. The Company Muster Roll for July and August 1862 shows that Jefferson Green Fields was present with his unit.

take the city from the east. General Sherman opposed the plan, but at the end of April, Admiral David Porter maneuvered Union gunboats past Vicksburg and ferried Grant's army across the Mississippi River. After five consecutive Union victories at Port Gibson, Raymond, Jackson, Champion Hill and Big Black River (see map, Attachment B), the Confederate Army of Vicksburg was surrounded. Grant began a siege on May 22 following three failed attempts to take the city by force.

At Grant's request, Admiral Porter launched five warships in an attempted naval attack on May 27. The upper river batteries, led by the 1st Tennessee Heavy Artillery, were instrumental in sinking one of the warships, the iron-clad gunboat *Cincinnati*. The remaining four ships were rebuffed by the lower batteries. Following this incident, Admiral Porter used his ships to relay troops and supplies, but attempted no more attacks.

Conditions were miserable for Confederate troops during the forty-seven days of siege. Subject to heavy fire from Union artillery, defenders dug caves in hillsides for protection from the shells. Troops not needed at the guns were assigned to act as city guard, fight fires, police the river, and aid the infantry. Summer temperatures approached 100°, and with the river in close proximity, mosquito-carried diseases were widespread. Chiggers and ticks also aggravated the men. To make matters worse, both drinking water and rations were scarce. Soldiers ate bread made of cornmeal and ground peas, whatever fruit could be found, even soup made of grass and weeds. By late June troops received just one biscuit and a small amount of bacon as a day's ration. It is no wonder that nearly half of the Confederate Army of Vicksburg was on the sick list or in the hospital by this time.

General Pemberton requested aid from General Joseph E. Johnston and waited impatiently for Johnston to arrive. When it became apparent that relief was not forthcoming, Pemberton polled his division commanders about the ability of their troops to evacuate. Each general reported that illness and fatigue would keep all but a few of the men from escaping.

On July 4 General Pemberton surrendered Vicksburg to General Grant. Terms of the surrender required the Confederates to stack their arms and march out. They

were then paroled,⁸ each soldier being allowed to keep his private kit, officers their sidearms, and field officers their horses. Paroling took five days, during which the Confederates were supplied with full rations, mainly hardtack and bacon, courtesy of the Union Army. The parole list included 29,241 men, including 3,084 paroled in hospitals. 2nd Corp. J.G. Field [sic] of Co. D, 1 Reg't Tennessee Heavy Artillery, was paroled to the field.

In his report of the siege, Colonel Higgins gave high praise to Colonel Jackson, “who, with his gallant regiment, bore the brunt of the labors and dangers of the siege, and was always ready, day or night, for any duty to which he might be called.”

The extent of Jefferson Green Fields' involvement in the Vicksburg Campaign is, unfortunately, unknown. Fields was a patient at the General Hospital at Lauderdale Springs, Mississippi beginning April 10, 1863. The hospital roll does not indicate the reason for the hospitalization, but Fields' 1892 pension application included mention of a wound, “from the effects of which he lost the use of his arm and partialy [sic] his eye sight.”⁹ This injury might well have been the cause of his hospitalization. The length of Fields' hospital stay is also unknown, but probably extended beyond April 30 when the hospital roll would have been made. If Fields returned to his regiment by the beginning of the siege on May 22, he may have been in some capacity involved with the sinking of the *Cincinnati* or, more likely, available for assignment to duties such as city guard. Since he was paroled to the field when Vicksburg was surrendered, Fields must have been ambulatory as of July 4.

AFTER VICKSBURG

There are no military records for J.G. Fields after the Roll of Prisoners of War taken at Vicksburg. It is possible, though unlikely, that the Confederate Army did not keep records during the parole period or that all subsequent records were lost.

⁸ In the Civil War, paroled prisoners were returned to their side after signing an oath of honor not to take up arms until properly exchanged. Sometimes parolees would wait for exchange at home, but usually they went to parole camps that both the Union and the Confederacy maintained.

Commissioners of Exchange for each government would compare parole lists and arrange exchanges. Exchanges were based on numbers and ranks of paroled soldiers; equal ranks were exchanged equally, while higher ranks could be exchanged for several lower ranks.

⁹ J.G. Fields filed a soldier's application for pension on June 18, 1892 in Pope County, Arkansas. Fields' application was examined and affirmed August 15, 1892 for \$50.

It is more likely that he was furloughed or released from parole due to illness or injury, or he may have simply left for home as many soldiers did after the surrender at Vicksburg.

If Fields stayed with his unit, he would have gone to parole camp at Demopolis, Alabama, and subsequently sent to camps at Atlanta, Georgia, and Marietta, Georgia. The regiment was exchanged on December 6, 1863 and ordered to Mobile, Alabama on December 11, then to the Appalachee Batteries on December 20.

On February 4, 1864 Major General D.H. Maury, commanding the District of the Gulf, ordered the regiment to consolidate into two companies, 3rd "A" and 3rd "B." In April the regiment was ordered to Fort Morgan, Alabama and attached to Brigadier General Richard L. Page's Brigade. That August, the number of men serving from the 1st Tennessee was reported to be 200. On August 23 General Page surrendered Fort Morgan, paying tribute to Col. Jackson and his men for valiant and efficient service.

The final report of the 1st Tennessee Heavy Artillery Regiment was on November 19, 1864, in a siege train company listed in the forces of the Trans-Mississippi Department with headquarters at Shreveport, Louisiana. The company was under the command of Captain Paul T. Dismukes.

An undated report from Colonel Andrew Jackson, Jr. raises a remote third possibility: "a number of the regiment, after being furloughed when paroled, joined the cavalry in North Mississippi and West Tennessee, and are now on duty with General Forrest's Command." In the report Jackson noted that the regiment and attached companies when captured and paroled at Vicksburg had included between 500 and 600 men, but now numbered just 176.

It is probable that only young and healthy soldiers took this route. But in the unlikely (and undocumented) event that J.G. Fields did join the cavalry, he would have traveled back to Fort Pillow, Tennessee and to Forrest's great victory at the Battle of Brice's Cross Roads, Mississippi in June 1864.

This much *is* known: Andrew Jackson Fields, son of Jefferson Green Fields and Ann Eliza Caples, was born on August 11, 1865. Two months later, on October 26, J.G. Fields married Ann Eliza Caples in Fayette County, Tennessee.

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ATTACHMENT A



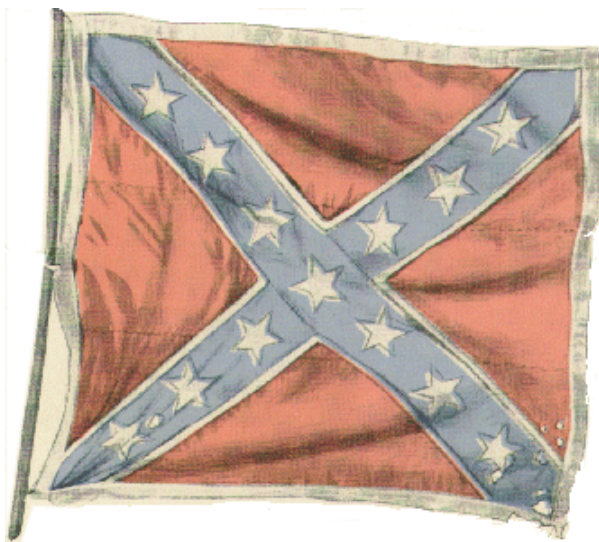
Service Dress,
Confederate Artillery



Corporal's chevron,
Confederate Artillery



Crossed Cannons
Artillery Badge



Confederate Battle Flag

ATTACHMENT B

