

Thomas Whittaker Hancuff
(6 March 1827 to 23 March 1862)

Thomas W. Hancuff was my Great great grandfather who was killed in the First Battle of Kernstown on March 23, 1862.

All of this information was given to me by William Hancuff who has done extensive research on the Hancuff family. The following is from the biography of Thomas that William wrote.

Thomas' involvement in the Civil War and his unfortunate and untimely death, being the first man in the Pennsylvania 84th Regiment killed in the charge against Stonewall Jackson's troop at the battle of Kernstown on March 23, 1862 has led to considerable documentation regarding his life.

Thomas and his family resided in the Beaver Dams Valley, Thomas' family included six children, five sons and one daughter when the War of 1861 hit. One more son was born Oct. 16, 1861, just one month after Thomas enlisted. Thomas was mustered into service December 5, 1861 and as fate would have it, he never saw his children again.

On September 19, 1861 Thomas Hancuff at age 34 along with several other neighbors enrolled to serve three years, or during the war, in the Union Army at Yellow Springs, PA. He was mustered into service as a Private on December 5, 1861 at Harrisburg, PA in Company E of the 84 Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers.

The following are excerpts from Thomas W. Hancuff's letters to his wife, Lucinda during his brief service in the Union Army.

*Harrisburg, Pa.
Camp Curtin
December 6, 1861*

Dear Wife:

I received your letter, and was glad to hear from you. I have had my likeness taken, and will send it to you soon. Pray that God for Christ's sake, may have mercy on the 84th Regiment, and take away our sins, so that we may give a good account for our behavior here. We can't tell one day what we will do the next.

Give my love to all,

T. W. Hancuff



Thomas Whittaker Hancuff

Harrisburg, Pa
Camp Curtin
December 23, 1861

Dear Wife:

I suppose you have heard that I had the measles. I am well again, but the doctor will not let me go to my quarters yet, lest I should take cold. I am in the new hospital, and am well taken care of. There are twenty-nine of us in here...five of our company came in here on the 11th inst. We are all getting better. I received two numbers of the Religious Telescope, and your letter and mother's.

Tell Mr. Werts that I will pay him for the fodder as soon as I can. I am much obliged to him for his kindness to you. I hope God may bless him, and all that he doeth, may it prosper for him.

I would like to see you and the children once more before I go; but oh! It would be so hard to part again. I hope we will soon be done with war. Pray for us, that God may help us to call on Him. I thank God for what He is doing for me. Give my love to all.

Your husband,

T.W. Hancuff

Hancock, Maryland
January ??, 1862

Dear Wife:

We left Camp Curtin (Harrisburg, Pa.) on the 31st December, and went in the cars to Hagerstown. We had to stay in the cars all night. Next day, (New Year's day) we marched to Clear Springs, Md. There we had to lay in a field all night: it was very cold, the North wind blew very hard. Next day we came to Hancock and received our arms. On the 4th, crossed the Potomac and went to a town called Bath; it was our intention to hold the town. We went on the hill and planted two guns, and then waited till morning. It was a cold wait, I assure you. We could see the light of the enemy's camp all night. They sent out there pickets, and we sent them

back again. Then their whole column moved forward. Our big guns told them to halt, and they did so. They then sent out some lead, which went over and around us; the most did not reach us, as we could see the snow fly up wherever they would strike the ground. They soon ceased firing, and made a flank movement. They had about fifteen men to one of ours, and we had only ten rounds of cartridges apiece, and no provisions, so we had to retreat, which we did in good order, till we reached Hancock. Whilst we were crossing the river, they opened on us again with their artillery; they threw two shells over us, on to the railroad; they could not see us, but if they had known it, we were in their grasp, as our artillery was below town. Some of our men waded the river, but as for myself I would sooner have fought than wade the river, so I waited and got on the last boat that went over. They continued to throw shells into the town, to frighten us out. Next day (Sabbath) they sent over a flag of truce, and ordered us to surrender, or they would bombard the town. But as our reinforcement happened to come up just at this time, was had a nice time of it, and Jackson turned his attention to Cumberland. But I must close. Give my love to all. Pray for me. I want to meet you all in Heaven.

Your husband

T.W. Hancuff

*Camp Kelly
January 13, 1862*

My dear Wife:

I wish to let you know that I am well. We left Hancock on last Friday at two o'clock, P.M. with two other regiments, and marched to Cumberland. There are a great many troupes here, three regiments more just came down today. We use water out of the Potomac river. I don't think we will go over the river yet for a week or so. Then we will be strong handed, if the Lord goes with us. I have not heard from you since I left Camp Curtin. I would like very much to hear from you, and know if you are all well. I would like to see you and the children. When you bow down to pray, think of your husband who is in the army, surrounded with men on all sides, with no alter of prayer. Tell my Christian friends to pray whilst their privilege lasts. Please give my love to Aunt R. and family, and all my friends and acquaintances.

I remain your husband until death.

T.W. Hancuff

North Bridge
January 29, 1862

Dear Wife:

I received your letter of the 16th inst., and was very glad to hear from you. I received the mittens also; they were thrice welcome, as I needed them very much. Every time I put them on, I will remember you and aunt and Mary. Give my love to them. We were taken back to Cumberland last week. We were there over the Sabbath, and I had the privilege of going to church in the evening. You need not send me anything more but good letters. We have had marching orders for the last two weeks. I think the reason we don't go is because the roads are so muddy, and the nights so dark.

We have plenty of provisions, such as crackers, mess pork, and coffee, but we sometimes get very tired of it. I have not lost anything in weight. I weight 155, and this what I weighted when I was at home last. I am getting along very well. Thank God for his mercy to me. To his name be honour and glory, for ever and ever, amen. If I meet you no more on earth, I hope to meet you in Heaven.

T.W. Hancuff

North Branch Bridge, Md.
February 6, 1862

Dear Wife:

I received my pay this morning up to the 31st of December last. I sent you forty dollars by way of Adams Express Co. I think we will leave here tonight. You will hear of a fight soon. I hope the Lord will help us.

Dear wife do not be uneasy about me. I will try to do my duty in God's name. I will write to you as soon as I can.

Write to me, and let me know if you get this letter. I would like to see you. I hope I will get home next spring. Give my love to all the children. Farewell.

T.W. Hancuff

*Paw Paw, Md.
February 16*

Dear Wife:

I received your letter yesterday. I was glad to hear from you. I am well at present; thank God for preserving my health and strength thus far.

The battle which we expected took place on the morning of the 14th inst. The infantry did not get up in time the cavalry were the only troops engaged in the fight. Our loss was two killed. Our men rode into the enemy's camp on a gallop, Gen. Lander in front. The fight was in Bloomington gap (Md.). They had men on the hill, behind trees and rocks. Our men fell back with their dead and wounded. They brought in (of the rebels) 34 privates and 15 commissioned officers...one was a Colonel. The men say they were pressed into service.

We are determined to do all we can to save the Union. We will soon have this end of Virginia safe, so far as rebelism is concerned. Sometimes we have to lay out at night. We laid out four nights without tents.

From Clear Springs in Maryland, our journeyings have been among the mountains. I would not like to live in this country. Cumberland has splendid buildings and is said to number 6,000 inhabitants.

I am not tired trying to serve the Lord. I am determined to fight the good fight of faith. I have the comfort to know that Christ is mine. May I be able to serve Him who died for me, whilst I live. Tell Henry I read his letter with pleasure. I would like to hear from him soon again. Give my love to all my friends and acquaintances.

Farewell, my dear, till we shall meet again.

T.W. Hancuff

The above was Thomas' last letter to his wife.

Alfred Aurandt, a relative by marriage witnessed Thomas' death in the battle of Kernstown and wrote home about it. The following is the exact contents of that letter.

Winchester
March 26th 1862

Dear Father,

I again take the pleasure of writing to you to inform you that I am well at this present time and Will Stevens is well and I hop that these few lines may find you all enjoying good health. I had a letter already wrote and was going to send it to you and this battle stoped me from sending it. I thought I would wait till the battle was over and then I could tell you more but I can not tell you much about the battle yet any more than that the old 84th was pretty badly cut up. I can not tell you the straight story yet how many was killed or wounded. There was five killed out of our company. Thomas Hancuff was the first man fell in our company an Jerry Gates, John Kelly Emanuel Brubaker and the Captain. And the wounded is Hugh Smith, Joseph Ledger, William Gallagher, Perry Hawkins and Alexandria Taylor slightly. I can not tell how many rebels was killed. I heard that there was about three hundred killed and a great many more wounded. I seen there was ninety two rebels in one hole. The just put them in without cleaning them or anything. Our fellows is getting coffins for our dead. They are buried just as nice as if they had been at home. There was only about two or three thousand of our fellows engaged at once and there was about fifteen thousand rebels. The rest of our fellow was at the right and left of the 84th P.V. 14th Indiana and the 8th Ohio. The 84th was in front of their batteries. They had to march about half a mile in the open field to make a charge on their batteries. They took two of our cannons but we soon got them back and five of theirs with them two pieces that they took from us. The rebels had the advantage of us. They were in the woods and behind the rocks and we could not see them til they would stick up there heads to shoot. So you may know near about what for soldiers they are. They would not come out of that to fight us till our fellows made the charge on them. Then they took down through the woods like sheep. We had chased them for miles on the other side of strawsburg and had just got back on thursday and on satterday the rebels came to Winchester. There was none of our troops on that side of town but it was not long till they were routed out of that and chased them out to kernstown on satterday and they made a stand there. Jackson had got reinforced by two other generals and by the trees and rocks and he thought he would make a stand there and on Sunday morning they fired on our fellows. Then it commenced and continued till night. Then the rebels fled and our (some) fellows followed them about four miles. Then on Monday they chased them apased strawsburg again and today we heard the cannon. I expect banks has caught them out there. I will have to stop for this time. It is getting late. If we go on a march I can not write for a while. Write soon. Nothing more at present. Still remains your beloved son.

Alfred Aurandt

The following was taken from The Blair County Whig, Saturday, May 24, 1862

Another Soldier Gone

Mr. Editor: As this is a time of great National calamities, when the scourge of war has spread sorrow and devastation over our once happy and peaceful country, and draped many hearts in the deepest mourning for the loved ones who have been called to lay down their lives on the altar of their country, it becomes my painful duty to chronicle the death of one who fell manfully contending for his country's rights, at the battle near Winchester, VA on the 23rd of March.

Thomas Hancuff, the subject of this notice, was born in Huntingdon (now Blair) County, in the year 1827. Being from his youth up religiously inclined, he early sought and embraced the truths of the Gospel and became an exemplary member of the Lutheran Church. At the time of the commencement of our National troubles, he was impressed of its being his duty to volunteer in the service of his country; and, notwithstanding the many entreaties of an affectionate wife with seven small children, to whom he was devotedly attached, he enlisted, and left the comforts of home, with all its endearments, to go and bear the hardships of a soldier's life, believing, as he said that it was the Christian's duty to go and fight for the liberties he enjoyed. He left home on the 23rd of September last, to engage in the active duties of a soldier's life, and after having served his country manfully for the brief space of six months, he was one of the gallant 84th that fell at Winchester, on the 23rd of March, pierced through the brain by a rifle ball. He died without a struggle or regret, when the shout of victory was ringing, in the defense of those principles which are so dear to the heart of every true patriot, and which nerved his arm in the day of battle, as a letter from an officer in the company to which he belonged, (and which I will here insert), will testify. It was written in reply to one which had been written to him making inquiries in regard to his fall on the battlefield:

Mrs Lucinda Hancuff

*Berryville, Va
April 10, 1862*

Dear Madam:

On yesterday I received your letter of the 31st March, requesting me to inform you of the particulars of your husband's death, and all appertaining to it.

He died like a brave and gallant soldier, under the flag of his country, fighting for the preservation of that government established by the patriots of the Revolution. He suffered no pain – pierced by a rifle ball through the brain, when the shout of victory was ringing, his face in death retaining the triumphant expression that animated it as he fell.

When the battle closed, his body was taken with the captain's and the others and placed in safety. Next day, it was brought to camp in a coffin made by his messmates' hands, wrapped in his great coat. He sleeps side by side, in the cemetery of Winchester, with his comrades who fell

in battle. On a little board at his head is written his name, his regiment and company – enough to tell that a soldier of the Union sleeps beneath. His surviving comrades, who were with him in the fight, all bear testimony to his bravery, his patriotism and worth.

His testament, and two other little books, with some letters, are in his knapsack. I will embrace the first opportunity to forward them to you.

Hoping that He who befriends the widow and the orphan, may provide for you and your children,

I remain your obedient servant,

*P.F. Walsh
Captain Co. E, 84th Reg't., P.V.*

Although it was reported that Thomas was initially buried at Winchester Cemetery, it is probable that he had a field burial along with the others killed in the battle. In any event his body was later moved to the Evangelical Lutheran Cemetery at Yellow Springs.

Cathy Paine