

CAPTAIN DAVID WILLIAMS



David Williams was born in 1821 in what was then New Hanover County, North Carolina. (now Pender). At an early age he joined the local militia unit, the Wilmington Light Infantry. On October 23, 1846 Captain David Williams was married to Miss Sarah L Holmes of New Hanover County.

Following the fall of Fort Sumter, and the threat of an invasion from the north; North Carolina on May 20, 1861 seceded from the union and put out an urgent call for volunteers to serve the state. Captain Williams immediately responded. Captain Williams could have easily justified not answering the call. He was near 40 years old at a time when the state was commissioning colonels and generals very much his junior. He had a prosperous and comfortable farm in what is now the Holly Shelter area of Pender County but at the time was in the northern part of New Hanover. He had several outstanding loan obligations to banks and individuals; He had a wife and five children, all below the age of 15. The fact that he faced his duty to his state properly and vigorously is reflected in the fact that his commission is dated from May 16, 1861, four days before North Carolina seceded.

Captain Williams raised a full Company of local men in time to be enlisted on June 1, 1861. They called themselves the "Holly Shelter Volunteers" but officially became Co K, 3rd Regiment, North Carolina State Troops, after arrival at Garysburg North Carolina for basic instruction. Further training and picket duty in North Carolina and the Aquia Creek area of Virginia occupied the regiment until it was called upon to participate in the defense of Richmond against the advancing forces of General George McClellan. Upon arrival in Richmond, the regiment was directed to set up camp along the Williamsburg Road on June 1, 1862. At about the same time the third regiment was assigned to a newly formed brigade commanded by Brigadier General Roswell Ripley of SC. In addition to the 3rd North Carolina, Ripley's brigade consisted of the 1st Regiment, North Carolina Infantry, the 44th Regiment, Georgia Infantry and the 48th Regiment, Georgia infantry. The Brigade was assigned to Major General D.H. Hill's Division. From June 3 until June 26 the regiment was assigned picket duty, although they did engage in a skirmish on June 15 near Seven Pines. Things would change dramatically on June 26, 1862, the second day of what has now come to be known as the Seven Days battle.

In the well-documented effort by Ripley's brigade to extract General Dorsey Pender's troops from an ill advised attack before Mechanicsville, the 3rd Regiment lost 8 men killed and 39 wounded. The 1st NC Suffered 142 casualties and the 44th Georgia 335. It was these and other terrible losses in the division which caused General Harvey Hill to later say, "We were lavish of blood in those days, and it was thought to be a great thing to charge a battery or an earthwork lined with infantry." At Gaines Mill on the following day the regiment lost one killed and 15 wounded. Next came Malvern Hill. At noon on July 1, 1862 Ripley's brigade was posted behind the Parsonage which marked the far left of the Confederate forces. Quoting from the Regimental history of the 3rd North Carolina as it appears in Clark's North Carolina regiments, "Being ordered to advance, the whole line moved forward up the hill, across the parsonage yard, into the road beyond. Being under a most terrific fire of musketry and canister, and in close proximity to the enemy stationed in an open field in the front, the left of the regiment penetrated the woods beyond, into the open field, where it engaged the enemy, making several charges upon him, led by Captain David Williams of Co K., and causing the battery in front to move back. To Captain Williams and his men great praise should be accorded for their gallantry." "The next day the dead of two regiments, the 1st and 3rd North Carolina were found nearer to those of the enemy than were those of any other troops on this part of the line, proving that they approached nearer the enemies "line of battle" than any of the other regiments that fought on this part of the field." The 3rd North Carolina's losses were heavy, 23 killed, 112 wounded, and 7 missing. Among those killed was Colonel Gaston Mears, the commanding officer of the regiment since it's origin. Leadership of the 3rd Regiment fell to Colonel William L DeRosset.

Soon they stood watch over General McClellan's forces at Harrison's Ford until they, along with the rest of Hill's Division were ordered on to the roads which would eventually lead to Sharpsburg, Maryland. During their stay near the Potomac, Captain Williams "Was conspicuous for his faithful attention to his sick; for which duty he was well qualified by having devoted much of his time to the study of medicine, and its practice among his neighbors, often without fee or reward, or the hope thereof". The trek toward Maryland began on September 2, after Second Manassas. Along the way they in camped at Frederick, Maryland until the division moved out as the rear guard of Longstreet's column. The regiment, still in Ripley's brigade, saw heavy action at Fox's Gap on September 14, retiring under orders on the 15th and going into encampment on the Heights east of Antietam Creek on the evening of the same day. The brigade remained in that same position throughout the following day, however by the evening the battle had started, and General Ripley was ordered to move the brigade to a spot opposite the Dunker Church and south of the Mumma farmhouse, (Which the 3rd North Carolina would be ordered to burn to the ground on the following day). The call to action for Ripley's brigade came shortly after 7 AM on September 17. By that time Brigadier General John Bell Hood's division had seen its countercharge through Miller's cornfield in the nearby woods falter to the point that reinforcements were desperately needed.

Accordingly, Ripley's brigade moved to the edge of the cornfield where they fought valiantly until their ammunition was exhausted and they were forced to withdraw. During the struggle the 3rd North Carolina suffered 253 casualties (the highest in the brigade) including 46 killed in action. Although Captain David Williams survived this encounter, six of his fellow officers were among the dead and 11 more were carried from the field severely wounded. Among the wounded was Colonel DeRosset, who would never recover sufficiently to rejoin the regiment. Quoting from the post battle report of Major S A Thruston, Who assumed command when Colonel DeRosset fell, "We were drawn off to the rear to procure ammunition and organize our shattered works. This completed, we were again ordered to the front; while executing this move, a shell from one of the enemies guns exploded in our midst, killing the brave and gallant Captain Williams and the young and intelligent Lieutenant Speight, while 14 men were disabled". A slightly different account from acting adjutant John Van Bokklen appears in the Wilmington Journal of September 29, 1862: "While the regiment was going to the battlefield in the evening, a shell exploded in the ranks, cut off the leg of Lt Speight and passed through the body of Captain Williams (Co K). Lt Speight was removed to the hospital, where he died. Both men were buried in the same grave".

Although the body of David Williams was never returned to his native soil, the following appears in his epitaph, which was published in the Wilmington Journal: A touching and impressive funeral sermon was delivered on the first at Mount Williams Church, Holly Shelter, upon the occasion of the death of Captain David Williams by the Reverend Duncan Black, and the heartfelt emotion evinced by the large congregation testified to their appreciation of the fact that the shaft of death in this instance had indeed been cast at a shining mark."Sarah Love Holmes Williams, The widow of David Williams, was possessed of a proud heritage in her own right. Her great grandfather on her mother's side was James Kenan, a general in the Revolutionary war and a native North Carolinian. Her great grandfather on her father's side was Richard Clinton also a General in the Revolutionary war.

Such was her grief, however, that, according to family history, she "took to her bed upon learning of his death, never to rise again". It is a certainty that she departed this life on October 25, 1862, just 38 days after her husband. Their surviving children who were Thomas, age 14, David, age 10, Catherine, age 8, Elizabeth, age 5, and Harry, age 3, were accepted into the homes of family members.

The men of the 3rd NC regiment would have occasion to visit the Sharpsburg battleground once more. On June 18, 1863 the regiment moved across the Potomac at Shepherdstown and encamped near the Dunker Church. One of its members later wrote: "while here and in the quietude of twilight, when all nature seem to be in repose, and so emblematic of those weary souls which sleep peacefully under the sod of this place, made so memorable by the heroism displayed by them scarcely 12 months ago, and the 1st and 3rd regiments assembled, and with arms reversed and to the roll of the muffled drum marched to the battlefield, where the Reverend George Patterson, Chaplain of the 3rd, read the burial service. A detail under the command of Lieutenant James Metts had previously during the day fired a military salute over the spot where the bodies were buried. Upon this solemn occasion many tears stole down the bronzed cheeks of the old veterans, and all heads were bowed in grief".

In the lovely Rose Hill cemetery in Hagerstown, Maryland, there's a section known as the Washington Cemetery, where over 2000 Confederate soldiers from the battle of Sharpsburg and South Mountain were moved and laid to rest. Only 346 were able to be identified. One of those is "AW Speight", the Lt who was buried with Captain Williams.

Submitted and Remembered by the North Carolina Division
Sons of Confederate Veterans