

James C. Davison Files

James C Davison in the U.S., Civil War Soldier Records and Profiles, 1861-1865 (Ancestry)

Name: James C Davison

Residence: Sciota, Dakota Co., Minnesota

Age at Enlistment: 20

Enlistment Date: 18 Aug 1862

Rank at Enlistment: Private

Enlistment Place: Sciota, Dakota Co., Minnesota

State Served: Minnesota

Survived the War?: Yes

Service Record: Enlisted in Company F, Minnesota 8th Infantry Regiment on 18 Aug 1862. Mustered out on 11 Jul 1865 at Fort Snelling, MN.

Birth Date: abt [sic] 1842

James C. Pvt Davison in the Minnesota Civil War Soldiers (Ancestry)

Surname: Davison

Given Name and Rank: James C. Pvt

Age: 20

Induction Date: 18 Aug 1862

Regiment: F EIGHTH

Birth Place: Nova Scotia

Town of Residence: Sciota

County of Residence: Dakota

State of Residence: Minn [sic]

Discharge Date: 11/JUL/1865

Fortress Rosecrans near

Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Nov. 28th 1864

Sister Ina

It has been something over a week since my last letter home so I will send a few lines to let you know that I am all right. We have moved our camp since I wrote before. We were camped about as far on the other side of the town as we now are this side, which is most a mile. We are camped now inside the old fortifications and I tell you it is a strong place. Some poor Union soldiers have done an awful sight of work here sometime. I suppose there has been some pretty hard fighting done around here and the country shows it too, as well as the graveyards around the town. Old cannon balls of every size and shape and broken bayonets and guns and etc and etc and amo [sic] to be picked up everywhere in any direction. And from the preparations now being made we might almost think that there is a chance for some more fun yet, but what it is we don't know anything about. When we came here there was only part of one Regt here besides us and within four days there has been nine Regt's came in here and the pickets have been doubled and every man is in readiness [sic] to be called upon. There is somewhere near nine thousand soldiers inside of the fortifications and I think if old Hood should see fit to give us a call we could give him a pretty warm reception with ready arms and we have some big old pieces laying up on some of our embankments that can speak with an awful voice when it is called upon. We hear a great many reports about the movements of Hood's and Thomas's Army's [sic]. We have heard of several towns not far off that he has burnt, but we don't know how much of it is true. I should kind of like to have a hand in one little skermish [sic] with the old fellows.

We have had awful wet weather since we came here there has not been more than four days that it has not rained and some days steady and hard all day. The inhabitants say it is a very unusual wet time even for this country. There was one or two days pretty cold but generally it is very warm. Now it is very comfortable in our tents without a fire. That is more so without than with. The tent I am in is a teepee. Six of us got some poles and took our pieces of shelter tents and made us a nice wigwam. We have a little stove in it and I tell you it is a big improvement over the shelter tents. Our quarters will be ready for us in about three or four weeks. I suppose you are having cold weather and several feet of snow up there now, while here it is comfortable to sit outdoors and write.

I have not seen any of the other Minnesota Regiments since we came down here. I should like to come across some of them. Is Sam at Snelling yet? I wonder why he don't write me a letter sometime. I am sure I wrote to him since I have heard from him. I hear that Morrystown is building up fast now. Who is investing there now? I suppose that if I should go in there on the stage now I could not find my way out to go home. What has become of Doc and Milla? I hear nothing of them lately. How is that Post Office matter getting along out there. Can I direct a letter so that it will go right to our house soon? I sent five dollars in my last and said I would not send any more until I heard from it. The mail is very uncertain between here and Nashville now that the Guerrillas are taring [sic] up the track most every day now and there is so many reports about Hood it is not safe

to send it at all. I wish I could get a safe chance and send it all at once. There is no express nearer than Nashville. I close love to all.

From Bro Clifford.

[image: photo of [illegible] [illegible] Davison Co. F. 8th Regt. Minn [sic] Vol]

The 8th Minnesota Infantry Article
"The Indian Regiment"

The 8th Minnesota Infantry was formed on August 1, 1862. This coincided with the beginning of the Sioux uprising in Minnesota, and the new regiment was parceled out in dribbles and dabs across the state, providing garrisons for the small settlements and frontier forts.

Then [sic] regiment served in this manner until the spring of 1864, when it was assembled to participate i Colonel Alfred Sully's Missouri River Expedition against the Sioux. The regiment mustered at Paynesville, Minnesota on May 24, 1864 and received their regimental colors. They were given horses at the same time. On June 5, 1864 Colonel Minor Thomas of the 8th Minnesota led a column composed of that regiment, six companies of the 2nd Minnesota Cavalry, two sections of artillery, and a company of Indian scouts, 2,100 men in all, from Paynesville to the northwest, up the valley of the Minnesota River.

[image: photo of Alfred Sully with the caption: the son of a noted watercolorist, graduated from West Point in 1841. In the years preceding the Civil War he acquired a considerable reputation as an Indian fighter. At the time of the Sioux uprising in August, 1862 he was a cavalry commander in the Army of the Potomac. He was transferred west to Minnesota where he led a campaign against the Sioux and their allies which took the 8th Minnesota to eastern Montana.]

When the column reached the headwaters of the Minnesota River at Lake Travers near the border between Minnesota and present day North Dakota, it veered to west, travelling overland until it struck the Missouri River in early July, 1864. At that point it joined with the remainder of Sully's army. On July 19 the combined columns proceeded west, ending up in the headwaters of the Knife River in the Killdeer Mountains. They came upon a large Indian encampment and attacked it on July 28, 1864. Artillery and military discipline gave the Federal forces the advantage in what came to be called the Battle of Killdeer Mountain, and the Indians were driven off. The 8th Minnesota participated in the main action, and four of its companies were used to pursue the defeated tribesmen into the hills to the west.

[image: photo with caption: This 2008 photograph shows the Killdeer Mountain battlefield as it appears today. It is in western North Dakota, just to the east of the present day Badlands National Park. Brigadier General Alfred Sully attacked and dispersed a large Sioux encampment here in July 28, 1864. The 8th Minnesota, acting as mounted infantry, played a prominent role in the battle.]

The expedition continued to the west, passing through the North Dakota Badlands. While passing through the Badlands, they fought another battle with the Sioux at a place called Waps-chon-choka. The Indians were once again defeated, and following a pursuit of several days the Sioux dispersed in all directions.

At this point the troopers were in the easternmost part of the Montana Territory, and were very short of water. They moved north, and on August 12, 1864 they struck the Yellowstone River near what is now Sidney, Montana. Proceeding downriver, they reached Fort Union on the Missouri River. The Eighth was then sent north to the Canadian border in the hope that they would encounter the Sioux who had been driven out of the Badlands. The regiment did not encounter any hostile Indians and upon its return to Fort Union the bulk of the regiment was directed to return to Minnesota for assignment to the South. However, around two hundred men were sent two hundred miles to the west - deep into the heart of the Montana Territory - to succor an emigrant train that was being besieged by the Sioux.

The main body arrived at Fort Snelling in St. Paul on October 15, 1864, and received orders directing it to join the 13th Army Corps in Tennessee. The regiment travelled by steamboat and rail to Nashville. The highlight of the trip occurred in southern Indiana when the train carrying the regiment derailed. The soldiers were travelling in cattle cars, and as they pulled themselves from the wreck they were met by a local lady who inquired, apparently in the hopes of a low cost meal, whether there were any injured cattle. The "cattle" checked amongst themselves and advised the lady that no one had been hurt, least of all any livestock.

The bulk of the regiment arrived in Nashville in late November. Waiting for them was the 200 man contingent that had been sent deeper into Montana; it had come down the Missouri river in a steamboat from Fort Union to St. Louis and had come on to Nashville by rail. Since the 13th Corps was at that point retreating from Pulaski to Nashville before Hood's army, the 8th Minnesota, being a veteran unit, was sent to Murfreesboro to bolster the garrison there. Colonel Thomas, by reason of his experience in Virginia and Mississippi (with other Minnesota regiments) and on the Great Plains, was made a brigade commander.

[image: photo with the caption: Colonel Minor Thomas, commander of the 8th Minnesota Regiment, at the time of his discharge in July, 1865. Thomas staffed the war as a lieutenant in the 1st Minnesota Infantry and served in three separate Minnesota regiments, two as the commanding colonel. He fought in Virginia, Mississippi, the Dakota Territory, the Montana Territory, Tennessee, and North Carolina. He was a brigade commander in the last two campaigns. He was brevetted a Brigadier General of Volunteers in March, 1865.]

In the meantime, the Confederate Army of Tennessee, having fought the bloody Battle of Franklin, put Nashville under siege. John Bell Hood believed that if he divided his already badly outnumbered army and sent a significant body of troops to Murfreesboro he could somehow (a) get Sherman to retreat from Georgia, or (b) get Thomas to come out of the Nashville fortifications which would give Hood an opening to get into Nashville. Sherman at this point was halfway across Georgia. He was effectively incommunicado and completely independent of the Louisville - Nashville - Chattanooga - Atlanta supply line. He was thus beyond Hood's influence. For his part, Thomas would come out of the Nashville fortifications in his own good time, and hindsight tells us that this is not something that Hood really should have wanted.

[image: photo with caption: Major General William Bate. Bate was a lawyer from Gallatin in Sumner County who had served as an officer in the Mexican War. At the beginning of the Civil War he raised the 2nd Tennessee Infantry and was promoted to brigade and divisional command. He was wounded at Shiloh and during the Atlanta campaign. Postwar, he served as Governor of Tennessee (1883 -1887) and as a Senator from Tennessee (1887 -1905). He died in 1905.]

One of Forrest's divisions was already on the railroad between Murfreesboro and Nashville, burning bridges and capturing blockhouses. On December 2, 1864, Hood sent Bate's infantry division, part of Cheatham's Corps, to Rutherford County to do the same. Two days later Bate arrived and his division attacked Blockhouse No. 7, which protected the railroad bridge across Overall Creek northwest of Murfreesboro.

[image: photo of a blockhouse with the caption: While the location of this particular blockhouse is unknown, it was on the Nashville and Chattanooga rail line that ran through Murfreesboro and is typical of the blockhouses located at critical points along the line. While the log and earth construction protected against small arms fire, the blockhouses were extremely vulnerable to artillery fire. After the Confederates came up to Nashville General Thomas ordered the blockhouses between Nashville and Murfreesboro to be evacuated, but as is always the case in the military, someone did not get the word.]

The Federal garrison in Murfreesboro - including the 8th Minnesota - numbered about 7,800 men and was under the command of Lovell H. Rousseau. The garrison occupied Fortress Rosecrans, a huge earthwork constructed during the buildup for the Atlanta campaign for the purpose of defending the railroad. Around noon on December 4, observers in the fortress noted smoke and the sound of gunfire to the northwest, and the 13th Indiana Cavalry was sent to investigate. The Indiana cavalymen came upon Bate' [sic] attack, set up a skirmish line on the south bank of the creek, and sent back to Fortress Rosecrans for reinforcements.

[image: photo of Major General Robert H. Milroy with caption: Major General Robert H. Milroy was the tactical commander of the forces in the Fortress Rosecrans garrison. Milroy is best remembered for losing almost his entire division to Ewell's Corps in the Second Battle of Winchester on June 15, 1863, a run up to the Battle of Gettysburg. He was one of the few in his force to escape capture, and his Gideon Pillow-like flight led to a court of inquiry. He was exonerated but was sent to the backwaters of the west where it was thought he could do little harm. He remained bitter about this until the end of the war. This was illustrated in his report on the December, 1864 actions around Murfreesboro where he gave his patron General Rousseau "my most grateful acknowledgments for his kindness in affording me the two late opportunities of wiping out to some extent the foul and mortifying stigma of a most infamously unjust arrest, by which I have for nearly eighteen months been thrown out of the ring of active, honorable, and desirable service. " He did do well, but the Federal victory was not so much the result of his tactical prowess as it was the consequence of the collapse of the Confederate infantry.]

The reinforcements, consisting of the 8th Minnesota plus two other infantry regiments - the 61st Illinois and the 174th Ohio - and a section of artillery from the 13th New York battery, were led by Major General Robert H. Milroy. Milroy placed the 8th Minnesota and the Indiana cavalry on his right in front of the blockhouse, which was on the south side of the creek. The other two infantry regiments crossed the creek on the highway bridge (the modern Old Nashville Highway) about a half mile upstream. Expecting to confront Forrest's cavalymen, they were surprised to discover that they faced Confederate infantrymen from Finley's Florida Brigade. The Floridians were driven back but the Federal advance was stopped by a counterattack by Henry Jackson's Georgia brigade, which had earlier been occupied with wrecking the railroad. The Eighth could not find a ford over the creek, and so its role was limited to exchanging desultory fire with Confederate sharpshooters on the north side of the creek. At dusk the Federals (except the garrison of the blockhouse) returned to Fortress Rosecrans and the Confederates moved to Stewart's Creek, five miles to the north.

[image: Google earth view of Overall Creek Battlefield with caption: The battlefield has not been developed yet, and is more or less in the same condition that it was in 1864. The Creek meanders from bottom to top through the middle of the view; the banks are wooded. The 8th Minnesota and the 12th Indiana Cavalry were deployed on the south side of the Creek astride the railroad line, which runs parallel to and slightly west of the modern Nashville Highway. This highway did not exist in 1864. Since no ford could be found, neither unit crossed the creek. The blockhouse was on the south bank of the Creek east of the railroad bridge, and is marked on the map. The 174th Ohio and the 61st Illinois advanced north on the Old Nashville Highway and drove back Finley's Florida Brigade. Smith's Brigade came up from the north and held off the advancing Federals so that Charleron's guns could be safely withdrawn.]

On December 6 Bate was joined by Bedford Forrest with two cavalry divisions under William H. "Red" Jackson and Abraham Buford. Forrest assumed command. The Confederates were also reinforced by two more infantry brigades, Sears' Mississippi Brigade and Palmer's Brigade composed of North Carolinians, Tennesseans, and Virginians. Buford's Division was sent to the east leaving the Confederates with a force of approximately 1,600 infantry, 2,100 cavalry, and four guns. On the sixth Forrest demonstrated on Wilkinson Pike (now Manson Pike) a few miles to the northwest of Fortress Rosecrans, hoping to draw the Federals out into the open.

They did, but from a different direction. On the next morning Milroy came out from the fortress on Salem Pike, which runs southwest from Murfreesboro to Eagleville. He led a force of seven regiments formed in two extemporized brigades totaling 3,325 men and six guns. Colonel Thomas commanded the first brigade, composed of two regiments with combat experience - the 8th Minnesota and the 61st Illinois - and two green regiments, the 174th Ohio and the 181st Ohio. The two brigades marched out, Thomas' brigade in the lead. Almost immediately they began skirmishing with Confederate cavalry vedettes. They reached the home of a Mr. Spence. Mrs. Spence gave General Milroy a fairly accurate account of the Confederate dispositions, and for this service the General detached a company to take "a drove of sixty fine, fat hogs" from the Spence farm back the [sic] Murfreesboro. Milroy rationalized this on the basis that the Confederates would have taken the hogs anyway.

With this intelligence in hand, Milroy turned north and headed towards Wilkinson Pike, initially on country lanes and then overland. His intention was to keep his troops between the Confederates and Fortress Rosecrans. Forrest anticipated this, and drew up his infantry in a line running north-south in a tree line. The Confederate left was on Wilkinson Pike a short distance east from where the road crossed Overall Creek. The Confederate right was anchored on the creek. Forrest expected the Federals to attack this line head on, and as they did so he planned to have Jackson's cavalry division attack them in the flank from the north of Wilkinson Pike.

The Federal forces advanced through open fields towards the Confederate line, coming under artillery fire as they did so. This fire was accurate, and Milroy ordered his troops into a cedar brake where they would not be visible to the Confederate gunners. The 8th Minnesota was in the advance; its historian said that this was because it was "regarded as the best drilled and most reliable regiment in the command, its having been in the Indian War giving it a greater reputation than the same service in the South would." Indeed, it was referred to as "the Indian Regiment" by the other troops.

The Federals continued their advance to the north under cover. When they emerged from the woods they were astride the Wilkinson Pike, and as they began their advance they were in a position to outflank the Confederate infantry. The 61st Illinois formed a skirmish line in advance of the 8th Minnesota, which was north of the Pike, and the 181st Ohio, which was south of the Pike. The 174th Ohio formed on the left of the 181st Ohio. The Confederates shifted units to the north of the Pike, but in doing so left a gap of 75 to 100 yards between Finley's Florida Brigade and Benton Smith's brigade of Georgians and Tennesseans. The 8th Minnesota headed for this gap, giving an Indian yell. Jackson's Georgia Brigade was brought back to fill the gap, and in so doing fired into the rear of the Floridians, who were wearing blue Federal overcoats captured at Franklin. With the 8th Minnesota firing into their front, the Floridians began to retreat in some disorder. Forrest attempted to rally them, calling on a color bearer to turn and rally. When the color bearer failed to do so, Forrest shot him and seized the color himself. This had no effect on the Floridians and the rest of the Confederate infantry, seeing the line broken at the center, also began to retreat. Smith's Brigade, which maintained good order, covered the retreat along with Jackson's cavalrymen.

[image: Google Earth picture of the Battle of the Cedars battlefield with the caption: The site of the Battle has been changed beyond recognition by the construction of the Medical Center Parkway exit off of Interstate 24 in Murfreesboro. The only constant is that Manson Pike roughly follows the former route of Wilkinson Pike west of the Interstate. The Confederate infantry line ran SSW in a tree line from Manson Pike (Wilkinson Pike in 1864) to Overall Creek. Originally Finley's Florida Brigade was on the left, with Palmer's and Sears' Brigades to its right and Smith's and Jackson's Brigades in reserve. Keep in mind that by 1864 a Confederate brigade was about the same size as a Federal regiment. Milroy's Federals approached the Pike from the south, concealed from Confederate view by a thick wood. Thomas' brigade (of which the 8th Minnesota was a part) was in the lead. They would have come out of the woods about where the Interstate crosses Manson Pike on this map. They formed into line, with the 8th Minnesota was north of the Pike; the 174th and 181st Ohio were to its left, south of the pike. The 61st Illinois formed a skirmish line to their front. A second brigade consisting of the 177th and 178th Ohio and the 13th Indiana Cavalry (Dismounted) was in reserve behind Thomas' brigade and was not involved in the action. Since the 8th Minnesota was in a position to outflank the Confederate line, Bate moved Smith's and Jackson's reserve brigades from the confederate rear to a line north of the pike. In doing so they unfortunately left a 75 yard gap in the line between Jackson's and Finley's Brigades.]

The action was costly for the Confederates. General Bate reported that his division had lost 19 killed, including the lieutenant colonel of the 29th Georgia of Jackson's Brigade, and 73 wounded. Milroy reported capturing 207 Confederate prisoners, including 18

commissioned officers. The Federals also captured two Napoleons from Slocumb's Louisiana Battery, then under the command of a Lieutenant Charleron, and the colors of the 1st/3rd Florida Regiment. Forrest did not make a separate report f [sic] his casualties.

Federal casualties totaled 22 killed and 186 wounded. The 8th Minnesota bore the brunt of this, losing 13 men killed and 77 men wounded, including The Eighth had 13 men killed, and 3 officers and 74 men wounded out of a force of 29 officers and 529 men engaged. Lieutenant Colonel Henry C. Rogers, temporary commander of the regiment, was seriously wounded in the arm; he ultimately died of his wound in 1871 after serving a term as Minnesota's Secretary of State.

Following the Battle of Nashville, Thomas' Brigade, including the 8th Minnesota, was ordered to march cross country to north Alabama where it joined the 13th Army Corps. The 13th Corps went up the Tennessee and Ohio Rivers via steamboat, overland to Washington by rail, and by sea by ocean packet to Wilmington, North Carolina which had been recently been captured by the Federals. The 8th Minnesota moved inland, and on March 19, 1865 participated in the Battle of Kinston. In mid-July, 1865, the regiment left North Carolina and was mustered out at St. Paul in early August, 1865. Twenty-five years later the regimental historian gave this valedictory on the regiment:

"The Eighth regiment was fortunate in the character of its material; fortunate in the harmony within; fortunate in the variety of its service, mounted and on foot, railroad and steamship; fortunate in the wide extent of the United States it visited at Uncle Sam's expense; fortunate that in the last ear [sic] of the war it traveled more miles and saw a greater variety of service and country than any other regiment in the United States Army; fortunate that the end of its enlistment saw the end of the Rebellion and a saved country."

Nothing further need be said.

[image: Period Map of the Murfreesboro Area with caption: this map illustrates the Battle of Murfreesboro fought December 31, 1862 - January 2, 1863 using a map that was made late in the war. It has an unusual orientation - west, not north, is at the top of the map. It does show the two 1864 battlefields discussed in this article. The Overall Creek battlefield is in the top right comer - the blockhouse that the 8th Minnesota defended is shown just to the east of the railroad. The Cedars battlefield is in the top center. The Confederate line followed the tree line along Overall Creek. Milroy's troops passed along the front of the Confederate line using the woods just to the east (below on the map) as concealment. Once the Union forces came out of the woods they had less than 200 yards of open ground to cover before they hit the Confederate line.]