

James Hanes Letters

Sgt. Co B 124TH Illinois Infantry

Vicksburg Campaign

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James Hanes Background:

James Hanes (1827-1864) is referenced in the regimental history of the 124th as having obtained the rank of Sergeant.

However, according to the Databases of Illinois Veterans Index, James Hanes is marked as receiving the rank of corporal not sergeant. He was a member of company B (which is also confirmed in the regimental history) standing at 5'7" and entering the service at around the age of 35. He was older than the average civil war soldier. He is documented to have had brown hair, hazel eyes, and a light complexion.

He married Lydia Margaret McKinley on March 1st 1845 In Illinois.

He mentions Multiple children in his letters, they proved harder to research. Not much came up when looking for them through ancestry.

At the time of enlistment his occupation was listed as 'farmer' and his place of birth was listed as Southeast Putnam county, New York. He entered the service in Lodi, Illinois and was mustered in at camp butler, Illinois.

Actions of the regiment leading up to the date of James Hanes death:

On May 4th, 1864 the regiment was given marching orders for an 18 day long scouting mission alongside the 11th and 72nd Illinois infantry. Whether James was a part of this mission is uncertain. I would assume he marched along with the regiment due to being their sergeant. During this time persistent hot weather and dusty roads made the march a miserable ordeal for the men, with them often marching anywhere from 16 to 25 miles a day. On the 7th of May in Benton Mississippi the troops encountered rebel forces and were subjected to shelling and skirmishing, but the enemy quickly fell back. Remaining in camp until the 12th and 13th when the regiment was ordered for reconnaissance and then ordered to march for 3 days encountering some rebel troops and skirmishing. They eventually traveled to Deasonville, Benton, and Yazoo city before beginning to march back to Vicksburg on the 18th.

At this point it was mentioned that the "sick and footsore" were put on a boat down river to the original camp in Vicksburg while the rest marched back. Perhaps at this point James Hanes would have been sick and placed on the boat downriver. No cause of death is given on any record I managed to find, but if one were to infer based on the context surrounding the mention of his death in the regimental history; illness was the cause of his passing. According to [this website](#), about 50% of the army of the Tennessee was sick with malaria throughout the Vicksburg campaign. With the swampy terrain of Mississippi and the heat of the summer it would seem logical that many soldiers, both union and confederate would contract malaria.

Note on spelling and punctuation:

In regard to the spelling errors, they are kept as written unless it compromised the understanding of the sentence as a whole. Punctuation has been added in by me, and selective capitalization of names or places have been added by me as well.

I transcribed these to the best of my ability, there were a few sections that were difficult for me to connect to the correct rest of the letter. I used the context of the letters to help piece them together. If a section is highlighted in grey this indicates that I had a hard time piecing this section to the correct letter, and placed it where I thought it fit (to my best judgment).

If a word is enclosed in parentheses that means I was unsure, but fairly certain of the word and guessed my best at it.

Something that I really loved about reading these letters is that James Hanes used contractions (don't, won't, it's etc...). It is sometimes difficult to find contractions being used in mid-19th century correspondence due to it generally being considered improper letter etiquette, this gives the impression that Victorians also *spoke* without contractions. The James Hanes letters prove that this is a misconception, though it is easy to see how this could be thought! It is refreshing to find examples of this. It makes it easier to feel less distance between us today, and the lives of people who came before us.

Vicksburg May 25th 1863

Dear wife and children

I and the boys are in good health and I hope this will find you the same. We have ben here six days. The boys are in fine spirits. Our cannon are buisey shelling the forts and breastworks The boys are laughing to see the reables runn. Our lines extend all around the reable Breastworks we have them completely fenced in. I think they will be obliged to surrender soon. I think we will have to shell them out. We have tried to charge their breastworks but was repused. Several of our own boys ware killed by our cannon and also a number wonded. Our sharp shooters are within 20 rhods of their breastworks. They have got so they do not like to show their heads over their breastworks. They kill some of our boys and wond a grate many. Our boys fight well I think. Our generals have abandoned the idea of charging the reables breastworks. The cuntery round about Vicksburg is vary hilley whare we are. The reable breastworks are on the top of a high hill. We are lying on another hill abot 50 (?) rhods from their breastworks between them and us is a deep hollow or revene. So we have assend a high hill in order to charge their breastworks. They could slay nearly every man before we could reach the top and then we would have the breastworks to charge on which is from 6 to 12 feet high and a dich to cross. Our boys would be so fatigued a chargin down and up the hill they could not mount the breastworks. Natur and art has done everything it could for their protection, but we have the ded wood on them. We can shell them from the gunn boats and from whare we are so it will keep them in hot water all the time . Several charges has ben made, we have ben repused with heavy loss. To day we are supporting a batery. I have just received 3 letters, one from John P. the other from you. I tell you it does us good to here from home and friends. The battle of Raymond¹ and Champion Hill² I will say nothing about. Only we whipped them nicely you can see that by the papers and we are bound to play them out here. We have heard that Richmond is not taken, we have lost a great many men here. Our cannon are hurling shell into the reable breastworks, it is vary seldom that we get a

¹ Battle of Raymond- May 12th, 1863. Union victory

² Battle of Champion Hill- May 16th, 1863 – Union Victory

reply from their cannon. Some have deserted from the reables. They say the reables has not ten days rations. We keep them from the river and they are hard up for water. I think they will have to surrender in a few days or they will attempt to cut their way out. Our guns has just killed some more of our men. They seem to be vary carless(careless).

Note around the top edge of the paper: the reables has just hoisted a flag of truce. They met our boys. I see some return. Some think they will surrender soon.

You may ask if we have seen the elapant(elephant). Yes, we have. We have seen from the tip of his nose to the end of his tale, but we all want to see the end of this rebellion. We shal whip the reables if we take two years! We mean to do it sooner if they can stand to have us runn through the cuntery and take everything they have to live on, every mule, every horce, in fact everything they had. We had ought not to grumble. They are doing their best and they are on their last leggs. People are suffering for the want of food whare our troops have been. This is the telling blow to slavery and rebellion in the west. You remember I wrote to you that I thought Mickles was influenced by someone in town not to let Mary have surtificate. John P wrote to me the same. Thare is a cirtine(certIFICATE?) class in town bound to rule.

Shall all live to come home I want to see you all vary much but we must be pacient. Thare is a good time a-comming by and by. Tell the little boys to be good boys. I want the children all to go to school this summer. If you took Monro(?) Ormsby with you when you went to get a sirtificate I do not wonder your not getting one, if you had of got a school and failed as Mat Brooks did it would have hurt you vary much. Write how you all get along, how you all get your corn in. You make Kit do the plowing out corn. Turn old Fan out, feed Kit a little corn. Have your corn worked as soon as posable after planted. Jim sends Helen a ring. Now don't worry, I will write at the first opportunity. No more at present. write how you get along.

J Hanes.

Note at top beginning of letter: Jaine (?) I want you to take good care of the little colt. Be good girls.

Give my love to all, write how everything looks. We will try and get some better furniture as soon as we can. we want our house carpeted; we want a grate many things to make you comfortable. Send me a little black thread, no more.

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June the 16th

Camp near Vicksburg

Dear wife and children

I do not feel vary well to day. I have the diahreah a little. I have just ben and got some medison. I think I shall be all right in a few days . I have not received any letters from you in over a week. We have had two males (mails) since. I shall expect one next male (mail). Fernando got one from his mother, it was a good letter, he showed it to me. Things are going on here the same as when I last wrote, only we get nearer their works every day. It is thought we shall take Vicksburg in a few days. We get more shots from their cannon lately but have not done much damage. Yet I still remain at general Leggets³ head quarters . I had not ben up to camp some time until this morning. The boys all seemed glad to see me. We are like brothers. Some of the boys are sick. Chas. Cleaveland and Milton Beverly looks bad. They have the diareah. That is the worst disease we have here. I have ben vary free of it since I came in the cervis until within t(?)r the days I shall come out all right. Margaret you seem to worry about me more than I wished you did, let us take the world as it comes along. Don't worry about my getting hurt until I do. I have passed through this far all right and I hope I may the rest. God only knows who must fall. Our boys are noble boys. They are good soldiers. The best way for us is to do as Gen. Taylor said ' Trust in god and keep our powder dry'. I should like to come home, but I enlisted for three years and if I am alive well and nothing happens and the government wants me, I expect to stay. So we must be contented. The time will soon roal around. I do not think this will last long If we have good luck here. I can't see anything to hinder now of our taking Vicksburg. It would take a large army in our rear to drive us out of here. We are purty well fortified on the Big Black River, its hard streem to cross. They might have given us a heavy

³ General Mortimer Dormer Leggett. Appointed Brig Gen. of Volunteers in 1862 and participated in the Vicksburg campaign before being wounded.

battle there if they had stood their ground. Well, I tell you we shall give them the best we have in the shop every time. I do not know of anything more to write about. The was write (?) and let me and let me know how you get along. Pluck up! Have the best of courage! There is some talk of our getting pay, I would rather they would wait until we took Vicksburg. It may be they will. Write me how all the folks all get along. Give my love to them all and except a share for your self. Margaret I want you to manage buizness, as you think best in everything. I think the mares will pay well to let them raise their colts. I think we can get hay to winter our horses. We need not feed any grane if we do not work them. I think it will pay to have the mares raise the colts. If you can sell them be shure and get the money. I would you rather you would not sell the horses until the colts are wened. I should like to see you first rate. I could tell you more than I can write. I dout the girls colts brake until they are bitted. Write how they look. We will get someone to winter them if we don't sell the old mares. I do not want so much on your hands to do as you had last winter. If you take care of your cows and little colts it will be all I want you to do. A shell burst vary near our heads, but has not done any damage.

Jas. Hanes

Sunday July the 12th

Vicksburg July the 12th

Dear wife and children I am in good health and hopeful (that this) will find you the same. The last of the secesh troops are marching out to day they have been a marching for several days. It takes some time for them to get through our lines. We have to exam them all. Some undertook to carry --- out with them that was taken a(way) quick. I did not like Grant's trade (he) made with Pemberton⁴. I mean the way the surrender was made the secesh are allowed all of their private property. They go out with vary near as much as they had when they came in, only their armes they ware abliged to surrender and we knew it then I say Grant ought to of had an unconditional surrender. Perhaps everything is for the best, I have my opinion I think it was a good plan to parole the secesh for they will scatter so they never will get them together agane. they have already gone (in) all directions, some to Mississippi and Tennessee and Lou and Missorie and Al and Texas they all tell me they are going home. I think most will stay home if they get there. The Miss ---- ours (?) we had nuise (news) Port Hudson (had) surrendered now⁵. If our army in the east can do something which --- here, they have but we so muck(?)

We hardly know when we have a victory. I have just been reading the Times, dated July the 4th speaking of our position around Vicksburg + Johnson in our rear, also Port Hudson. He spoke in the most discouraging terms of a success, besides there is not one word of truth in its columns! Why will old Abe allow such a lying deceiving sheet to go among his people? The Times spoke of our blowing up the fort I do not know as I told you about the last time. Well, we blew the fort up the second time with complete success. We blew up from fifty to seventy-five men killed and wonded (wounded). Some was blown as high as forty feet in the are (air). One negro was blown up and came over in our works, fell on his head and sholders he was not hurt much. He said he was --(?) gone. Some of the boys asked him how far he went up. 'To (two) or tree (three) miles' I reckon he was nearly scart to death. He was the only one that

⁴ John C. Pemberton- Surrendered Vicksburg on July 4th 1863

⁵ Siege of Port Hudson- Confederates surrendered July 9th 1863, after hearing of Grants' victory at Vicksburg

lived out of six that was blown out on our side of the works. One thing I have got to say to my friends, kick any one that will read and countenance the miserable sheet the 'Times', all I can say is god bles my friends. We have had a glorious victory here, but we have a grate many brave soldiers that has lost his life in defence of his cunterys cause. I have talked with a grate many sothern soldiers same, seem to be vary kind harted they said we killed a grate many of their men in the brestworks. They said they beried them whare they fell. Men had been killed by our sharpe shooters over a mile + a half this the reabs have told me themselves. Thare is hardly a foot of ground but you can pick up miney balls on inside the reable works. The Reabs blame Pemberton. They call him a trator, some would shoot him if they could get a chance. I do not think of anything more to write you. I guess I will close. Give my love to all, this to my wife and children.

Jas. Hanes

Sept. the 7th '63

Dear Lydia and children

I have ben playing a game of marbeles we have some fun &(?) we hafto act up. Boy once in a while we get lonesom and we hafto do something to kill time. I should like to be home to help you fix for winter, but I have not much hopes of our getting home before our time is out. Things works vary strang. I have made up my mind we shall hafto go over every inch of the sothern confedercy. The reabs are hard up in this vicinity. Calico is worth eleven dollars per yard in Jackson Miss. and every thing in perportion. What do you think of that? Would you think they could fight under such circumstances? We shall whip them, but when it will be accomplished I cant tell. We hope soon they would loos (lose) all of their interest in the old flag I fear. I have reasons for saying what I say, for I have heard some say if the war lasted to(two) years more they would get money enough to have a nice start. The money is the grate ame with some. I was writing this last night and I was called away to take some of my men and arrest some soldiers. They ware abuseing negro wenches . I tell you, we have some inhumane boys in our army. Some are mean enough to do any thing. We have men th(at) fall behind in time of battle to pick the pockets of our own dead. Some men has got hundreds of dollars in that way. There was a Capt. Shot in the top of his--⁶ in our regt. at campean (Champion) hill. As he fell someone took his money, sord, Pistel and watch. When he came to was- (alone) Boys learn all kinds wickedness her(e). I can't write any more. Give my love to all and except (accept) the same.

This from your best friend J Hanes

Note at top : Frank and Charles I am glad you are good boys I hope you will be little men and help your Ma and love her like good boys.

⁶ It seems James rushed this part and forgot to say where the Capt. Was shot.

Head quarters 1st Brig 3rd division

17 army corps

Vicksburg miss. Sept 13, 63

Dear wife and children

As I was sitting in my tent situated on an elevated piece of ground where I can overlook a large portion of the city and inhale the cool breeze from the river. I thought I would write you a few lines. I have been in the service one year exposed to the hardships and privations of a soldier's life and yet I am not willing to give up the struggle. I am willing and ready to sacrifice all to save this noble republic from being sent asunder by the vile hands of traitors. Oh, that every one would say for himself I am ready how long would it be before we would see the strong arm of the government swaying its power through the south bringing into subjection all traitors and the stars and stripes made to float over every foot of American soil as Logan⁷ says it would not be six months before we would see the traitors in the south tremble at every quarter. They would cry out 'peace, peace'! I would say to every true patriot cling close to your country and the government. It carries with it liberty, and who would not lay down his life for liberty? Such men as Vallandigham⁸ are too cowardly to support a good big grasshopper. They cry out 'peace'! They think the soldier in the field is getting tired of the war but they are badly mistaken. If they could hear the soldiers putting forth in words and threats that would make them tremble they would not cry out peace, but would hunt a hiding place. The soldier's cry is 'down with the butternuts'.

It is very warm here, it goes hard with the soldiers but we bare up under it better than could be expected.

It is the sunny south without a doubt. Our regiment has dress parade late in the evening. Some of the ladies of Vicksburg come out to see us perform (perform). They seem to be well pleased. The health of the army is

⁷ John Alexander Logan – former U.S. representative, and commander of the 3rd Division of James B. McPherson's XVII Corps, which was the first to enter the city of Vicksburg in July 1863 after its capture. He then served as the city's military governor.

⁸ Clement Laird Vallandigham - a pro-slavery Ohio politician and leader of the Copperhead faction of anti-war Democrats during the American Civil War.

good and as soon as the warm weather is over you can look for stiring (stirring?) nuse (news) some
whare, for we are not the boys to lay idel when we have something to do. How I would like to see some
of our Lodi boys that we have left behind in the ranks by our side. We are not afraid to meet the enemy I
tell you we are in earnest. We like liberty and we mean to have it or some one will get hurt. I want to say
one word to my wife and children, don't worry about me. I never was engaged in a nobler cause, and if I
never see your faces agane, you can have it to say, 'my husband' - and the children also can say- 'he was
fighting for liberty'. Who would not fight for liberty, whare is the man that dose not like liberty? Tell my
friends and neighbors this is the feeling of the soldiers here. Down with buternuts and reable
sympathisers.

This to my wife - children.

Jas. Hanes

Its rather hard to see those staying at home that ought to go and help defend the stars and stripes, but I never have complained or grumbled in the least. I have often thought if president Lincoln had done like Davis called out every man capable of bearing arms, where would the rebels be today? Look at the draft, what have they accomplished? It does not amount to anything. I am in hopes something will turn up in our favor before long. I don't think there is but few officers that want this war to end, they see the best times they ever saw in their lives. I tell you our country is (corrupt?). I sometimes wonder how it is we have any victories. There is but few officers fight with the same spirit that Washington and his men fought. Take away the salary and how many officers would we have with us in less than week. Two thirds would be on their way home. Would it seem good if we all could surround our own firesides, and our country once more at peace. When that time will be we can't tell. There has been times when I thought this was near its end, as I have said before the rebels fight well. It takes man for man to whip them. We are a little better on a charge, but other ways they are just as good as we are. We want more men we have so many places to guard. It weakens our army. I was sorry to hear of Rosecrans' defeat⁹. Grant has sent him reinforcements and I hope to hear soon of a great victory. We are ready to follow our leaders, we want this little job done up. We want to see our homes, but we never want any (compromise) if we have to stay our time out. I enlisted for three years and if my country needs me, I am willing to stay.

I was unable to determine what letter this section belonged to. I am assuming due to context clues that it was written around early October 1863.

⁹ Mostly likely meaning the defeat of Rosecrans at Chickamauga. Sept 20th, 1863.

Head Quarters Vicksburg

Miss OCT the the 20th.

Dear Leydia and Children

I have just returned from our scout. my health is good and I hope this will find you the same. We had a good time we saw some reabs about five thousand all cavalry they would not fight. We swep the cuntry clean as we went. We went out about 40 miles there was no restraint on the boys they ware allowed to do just as they was a mind to burn, plunder and soforth. We had plenty of chickens , turkeys , I killed the fattest calf I ever saw and some vary nice pigs. We lived finely. I told the general the calf would not take the oath, he said "kill him", and so the calf had to die. We killed a few reabs...took som priseners we burned several mills and mashines (machines?) shops and a good many dwellings. Our boys got a good deal of plunder. To (two) boys on my detale got a good deal of stuff. I got to (two) coats, one vest, one nice silk cape, and one quilt. I will send the cape and one cote home if I have a chance. the coat is vary nice but it has been worn some and its most to(o) small. Our boys took all the reabs had to eat or ware (wear). Well I don't pity them, they have no business to be reabels. I saw a grate many crying and I told them we had fooled with them long enough. They had caused us to come here and we did not feel like playing with them any longer. Well I don't think they will want us to go over ground agane if we did we would not get much. How the people are a going to live I cant see. There is one thing - we don't care. I have no sympathy with a traitor. One old man and lady sat crying, I asked them what the matter was they said our boys had taken all they had biding and all they nothing to sleep on, an the boys was just taking the last pig he had. I told him I was sorry he was so unfortunete as to be a reb. The second day we met the enemy we had a little brush. My buizness is with the teams, we got the corralled and I went in a house. I asked the woman if there was any union people about there. She said no, I asked if she was a reabel, she said she was. She said a grait many lied to save their property but she would not lie to save her property. The consequential was her house was burned. It looks hard but it cant be helped.

OCT the 21st

Dear wife,

I will try and send you some things by express. The coat and cape and vest the cape you can all clame. I think it's vary nice. Fernand has come back , he said Robertson lost the things you sent. He gave me a small can full he braught from home. I should like to see you all vary much, but they all say that has went home they would not go again if they could go for nothing . I may come home this winter we shall get our pay the first of next month. I will try and send you sixty dollars. I have got to pay Johnson for the sled. The river is vary low so it takes vary long to go up and down the river. We get male vary slow. I got a letter the morning we left Vicksburg from you. I am always glad to here from home. I want you to let Monroe have the teem when he wants it, he will take good care of them. I can't write any more. Give my love to all. I remain your best friend

Jas. Hanes to wife and children.

