

THE STRANGE CASE OF THOMAS DRAYTON

by Mark H. Dunkelman

Thomas Drayton was born in the town of Carroll, Chautauqua County, on March 23, 1831, the son of William and Moriah (Worden) Drayton. His younger brothers William and Washington were born at Carroll in 1837 and 1843 respectively. All three brothers appear to have been residents of southeastern Cattaraugus County or nearby Pennsylvania at the outbreak of the rebellion. When President Lincoln called for 300,000 three-year volunteers in the summer of 1862, William and Washington Drayton enlisted in the newly-forming 154th New York Volunteers. William volunteered at Allegany for Company C, but when the company was mustered in he was sick and received a discharge. Washington enlisted at Olean in Company G, and was mustered out with the 154th at the end of the war after 32 months of service.

Thomas Drayton chose not to enlist when his brothers did. Perhaps the fact that he was married to the former Elizabeth Rounds and was the father of two children, Melissa Ann and Cornelius, influenced his decision. In any case, he and his family continued to live in Olean as the war dragged on, and he worked with a friend, 28-year-old Harvey Hoyt, as a lumberman in Allegany. But while Drayton and Hoyt tried to avoid the war, the war relentlessly sought them out. On June 22, 1864, the two men were drafted. "According to instructions," Drayton recalled years later, "we reported to the provost marshal at Dunkirk, but as by some error we had been drafted at both Olean and Allegany, he refused to accept us. He informed us, however, that if we would enlist we would go as volunteers instead of drafted men. We did this and as I had a brother in the 154th New York I asked that we might be assigned to that regiment. This was arranged and we were sent to Elmira. . . ."

Thus began an odyssey that led Drayton to more than a year's service in several states, but never brought him to his regiment--although on a couple of occasions he was within a short walk of the 154th! He and Hoyt arrived at the Elmira rendezvous on July 15, and two days later Drayton was temporarily assigned to the 86th New York Volunteers. But from Elmira he and Hoyt were delivered to the commissary of prisoners of the 8th Army Corps at Baltimore, Maryland, on July 19; to the Soldiers' Rest at Washington, D.C., on July 21; to the Rendezvous of Distribution at Alexandria, Virginia, on July 22, where Drayton was assigned to Company E of the 154th New York; and to Camp Taylor, near Alexandria, on July 27.

At Camp Taylor the two did guard duty until September. Coincidentally, for much of August and September, the 154th New York was encamped at Alexandria. But for reasons unknown, Drayton and Hoyt did not join their nearby command. Shortly before the 154th was transferred by rail to the western theater, Drayton and Hoyt preceeded the regiment on a westward railroad journey. On September 24, Drayton was received at Lytle Barracks in Cincinnati, Ohio, as a convalescent. Three days later he was sent to Louisville, Kentucky, arriving on September 28. Here he again came into close proximity to the 154th when the regiment passed through Louisville on its way to Alabama, two days after Drayton arrived.

Drayton was suffering from jaundice; medical records indicate he was also treated for diarrhea, mumps and gonorrhoea during his service. "When I recovered," he later recalled, "I found that Hoyt was doing guard duty at the barracks. We were soon detailed as train guards on recruit trains running between Louisville and Nashville." While performing that duty, Drayton and Hoyt might well have escorted approximately sixty volunteers who were

forwarded via that route to the 154th New York at Atlanta in the fall of 1864--but they themselves still did not join the regiment!

Years later, when Drayton applied for a pension, he displayed a scar on his left arm and right knee which he claimed was the result of an injury suffered in a train wreck on the Louisville to Nashville run. He and Hoyt rode the rails and did light duty at Barracks No. 1 in Louisville--"having never seen our company or regiment, and never receiving one cent of pay"--until May 1865. At that time, both men were sent from Louisville to join their regiment. Hoyt finally reached the 154th and was assigned to Company E on May 22, 1865, while the regiment was resting at Cloud's Mills, near Alexandria, Virginia, with the war over. Along with several other latecomers to the regiment, Hoyt was transferred to Company D, 102nd New York, on June 9, 1865, two days before the 154th was mustered out, and he was eventually discharged from that regiment. (Harvey Hoyt was recorded as an Olean resident on a 1905 list of the 154th's survivors; he died at Gaines, Pennsylvania, on September 2, 1914.)

"On the way [from Louisville] I was taken sick," Drayton remembered, "and as the hospitals at Elmira were crowded I was sent to my home in Olean. The 154th had not yet arrived in Elmira [to be discharged] and the surgeon promised to inform me when they arrived that I might, if able, go there and secure my discharge. I never was aware of the fact that the regiment had arrived until my brother came home. So I did not, even at the mustering out, see my company or regiment."

Drayton lived in Olean for about twenty years after the war, and then he began to move rather frequently, first to Jamestown and then to several towns in Pennsylvania--Derrick City, Warren, Tiona, Kinzua, Russell--while working as a farmer and laborer. He was residing at Russell in 1901, plagued with kidney, liver and heart troubles, when he decided to apply for a pension, and hired