ZENAS HARRISON BLISS
CIVIL WAR COLLECTION, 1864-1891

Collection Information
Biographical Sketch
Scope and Content Note
Series Contents
Cataloging Information

Processed by
Melissa Burlock
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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org
COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: One-half document case, 1 photograph folder, 1 oversized box, and 2 large flat folders

COLLECTION DATES: 1864-1891

PROVENANCE: Karl and Donna Bliss Jonas (great-granddaughter of Zenas Harrison Bliss)

RESTRICTIONS: None

COPYRIGHT:

REPRODUCTION RIGHTS: Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained from the Indiana Historical Society.

ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: P0455 Indiana Civil War Visual Collection


(Includes a composite photograph of the white officers of the 28th United States Colored Troops. Donors identified the officer in the back row, third from the left as Captain Zenas Bliss. OVC Graphics: Box 2, Folder 2)


Located at other institutions: Misc 102 Zenas H. Bliss Correspondence, 1862-1866. Leahy Library, Vermont Historical Society located in Barre, Vermont

Captain Zenas H. Bliss Artifacts, Photographs and Ephemera, The Albuquerque Museum of Art and History in New Mexico

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2012.0165 2012.0165

NOTES:
Biographical sketch of Zenas Harrison Bliss and historical sketch of the 28th USCT written by Wilma L. Moore.
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Zenas Harrison Bliss (September 12, 1842–January 26, 1929) was born and grew up in Johnson, Vermont. Prior to the Civil War, he attended secondary school at the Peoples Academy in Morrisville, Vermont while boarding with a local family in the nearby town of Calais.

In June 1862, Bliss enlisted as a private with the Ninth Regiment, Vermont Infantry Volunteers, Company I. After being formally mustered in at Brattleboro, Vermont, the regiment left their camp to help secure Washington, D.C. The Ninth joined other regiments under the command of Brigadier General Julius White.

Less than three months after joining the Union Army, Bliss became one of over 12,500 soldiers who, as part of an exchange program, were ordered to surrender to be paroled for a subsequent trade. Awaiting an official exchange, these prisoners were sent to Camp Douglas in Chicago. Although his regiment was formally exchanged in January 1863 (the same month that Bliss was promoted from Private to 5th Sergeant of Company I), they did not leave Illinois until the spring of that year. The Ninth regiment travelled to City Point, Virginia. After arriving in Virginia, Bliss received a position with the Brigade’s quartermaster. Over the next year he got several promotions and by July 1864, he was a quartermaster sergeant.

Zenas Bliss was recommended for a commission in July 1864. He received an official discharge from his service with the United States Army, enabling him to get an appointment as a white officer with the United States Colored Troops. Bliss was mustered in as the Captain of the 28th United States Colored Troops (USCT Infantry), Company K on September 18, 1864. Like the Ninth, the 28th USCT was assigned to guard duty at City Point. Located on the James River, this was the site of General Ulysses S. Grant’s headquarters during the siege of Petersburg. Bliss continued quartermaster duties and commanded the company. [For a regimental history of the 28th USCT, see below.]

In December, 1864, Zenas Bliss took a 15-day leave of absence from his war service to marry Sarah Ann Shelden. Both of them had attended the Peoples Academy. After the war Zenas and Sarah had eight children. They were: Nina Lee, Bertha Zelle, Deane Shelden, Myrtie Caira, Blanche Tryphena, Inez Marion, Sarah Mabel, and Zenas Evan. The family lived in Vermont and New York. During the late 1880s they relocated to Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Historical Sketch of the 28th USCT

During the American Civil War, the United States War Department issued General Order #143 creating the Bureau of Colored Troops on May 22, 1863. Under the command of
Major Charles Foster, the Bureau’s task was to handle recruitment, training, and placement of troops and officer selection for the Union Army. After the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, recruitment of black troops in Indiana and other states escalated. In November, 1863, Foster informed Indiana governor, Oliver P. Morton that the Secretary of War had authorized him “to raise one regiment or infantry to be composed of colored men, to be mustered into the United States service……” The regiment became the 28th United States Colored Troops. Prior to that, many Indiana blacks travelled to Massachusetts to fight with that state’s 54th and the 55th black regiments.

The 28th USCT was mustered into service in December, 1863 at Camp Fremont on the near south side of Indianapolis. This land was owned by attorney and businessman Calvin Fletcher and the camp was named in honor of John Fremont, an explorer, an 1856 presidential nominee, and a Civil War general.

When anxious and willing blacks were unhurriedly organized and permitted to fight for the Union army midway through the war, they were separated into segregated regiments that were commanded by white officers. Many of these officers had hailed from the northeast, and some had settled in the Midwest. Born in Massachusetts, Captain Charles S. Russell who had served with the 11th Indiana and the 11th United States Infantry was commissioned as a Lt. Colonel and was placed in charge of the 28th USCT. (By the war’s end, Russell who had briefly served as a brevet brigadier general was a full colonel.) Several companies were formed under Russell and attorney William P. Fishback. Zenas H. Bliss, who hailed from Vermont, received his commission as a captain in the 28th USCT, Company K, while he was serving as a Union soldier in Virginia.

On April 25, 1864, under the command of Lt. Colonel Russell, the 28th left Indianapolis for Maryland. The regiment engaged in several battles in Virginia and ended its service in Texas. In July 1864, the 28th was one of several black infantry regiments to fight at the Battle of the Crater (Petersburg, Virginia). Suffering many casualties during the disastrous battle, the regiment was decimated losing soldiers to death, wounds, and disease.

The 28th was actively engaged at Hatcher’s Run during the fall of 1864. It was attached to the 25th Corps, Army of the James and was given duty in the Quartermaster’s Department at City Point, Virginia. It was among the first of the Union troops to enter Richmond when the city fell on April 2, 1865. Afterwards the regiment was assigned to guard Confederate troops at City Point.

Leaving City Point in mid-June 1865, the regiment boarded the Ariel and New Jersey, two transports that had been used throughout the war to move troops on the waterways. Companies B, E, and K stationed on the Ariel arrived at Santiago, near the mouth of the Rio Grande on July 1. The next day they went to Indianola, but later orders rerouted them to Corpus Christi, Texas where they remained until the end of their service. Union troops were sent west for occupation duty in Texas, as a response to unrest at the war’s end. The soldiers also represented a show of force along the Texas-Mexico border to thwart a threat of invasion, since France had recently seized control of the Mexican government.
The 28th USCT mustered out of service in Texas on November 8, 1865. After leaving Texas, the regiment travelled overland to New Orleans where the soldiers boarded a steamer and went up the Mississippi to Cairo, Illinois. They then went by train to Indianapolis. On January 8, 1866, two days after their return to Indianapolis, the soldiers of the 28th received public honors on the south side of the courthouse square.

Six weeks after the surrender of the Confederate forces at Appomattox on April 9, 1865 (formally ending the Civil War), a huge two-day parade celebrated the Union victory in Washington, D.C. On May 23-24, 1865 none of the units from the United States Colored Troops participated in the celebration. The Philadelphia Inquirer editorialized “Their time will yet come.”

In July 1998, their time came when ceremonies were held for the first national Civil War monument dedicated to the black troops and their white officers. Activities included a Civil War Symposium for Descendants; Memorial Services at Arlington National Cemetery; a Freedom Ball and a Salute to the Sculptor, a Re-Enactor’s Parade, and the unveiling of the Spirit of Freedom sculpture. The monument was sculpted by Edward Norton Hamilton. The nine-foot, 3,000-pound bronze sculpture is located on a triangular plot at 10th and U and Vermont streets in the Shaw neighborhood in northwest Washington, D.C. The area was named to honor Robert Gould Shaw, a white colonel who served as commander of the 54th Massachusetts, one of the first activated regiments of black troops. Captain Zenas H. Bliss’s name is listed among the officers on the memorial. He is on the Wall of Honor on Wall B, Plaque 44.

Sources:
Material in the collection.
SCOE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Zenas Harrison Bliss Civil War Collection is a compilation of official forms, orders, descriptive supply lists, as well as correspondence, pertaining to Company K of the 28th United States Colored Troops (USCT) Infantry, the black Indiana regiment. Zenas H. Bliss served as captain of Company K. The majority of the documents are from the last two years of the Civil War, dating from July 1864 to December 1865. Post-bellum items, which include receipts from the Second Auditor’s Office of the Treasury Department, a proof of disability claim, and letters from Bliss, date from January 1866 to June 1891.

The documents, which are printed and/or handwritten, are categorized by subject and then organized by form number (when applicable) and date. Categories include muster and descriptive rolls of enlisted men, detailed inventory reports of camp equipment and supplies, orders instructing behavioral measures aboard the Ariel, and the discharge paper of Bliss. There are also files on insubordinate privates, departmental papers including Treasury Department and Department of the Interior forms, War Department circulars, and form letters addressed to Bliss from the Ordnance Office’s Property Returns Division.

These descriptive rosters, departmental forms and receipts, handwritten/typed letters, as well as supplementary materials from the donor, are organized into the following five series: Correspondence, Departmental Office form letters and Circulars, Official Adjutant General’s Office (A.G.O) Forms, Official Forms, and Official Orders, Lists, and Notes. The correspondence in this collection is comprised of handwritten letters pertaining to Zenas Bliss and his work. It concerns board meetings, transmission of charges, vouchers, transportation costs, and travel requests. Departmental Office form letters and Circulars include documents from the Quartermaster General’s Office, Headquarters Department of Virginia, Treasury Department, and the War Department. Official A.G.O. Forms include muster and descriptive rolls and inventory of effects lists. Official Forms consist of inventory forms as well as a Proof of Disability form. It is important to note that some of the identical forms, like Forms No. 3-(a.) and 7-(a.), are grouped together in the same folder.

Official Orders, Lists, & Notes contain three tiers of orders: Special Orders, General Orders and Orders. Special Orders pertain to enlisted officers and includes appointments, promotions, travel instructions, and a travel pass. General Orders comprise a host of instructions for conduct on land and at sea. For example, General Order No. 11 describes how enlisted men were to conduct themselves while aboard the Ariel. Orders mostly pertain to Captain Bliss, authorizing his designation as Brigade Officer of the Day, and the folder also includes instructions for Bliss, two other officers, and a detachment of 110 men to relieve another detachment in unloading a steamer. The series Official Orders, Lists, & Notes also contains detailed charges of enlisted men, as well as photocopies of papers compiled and gifted by the donors, Karl and Donna Bliss Jonas, which include a chronology and family tree of Zenas H. Bliss. Various names appear throughout the collection, especially in the form letters, Adjutant General’s Office Forms, different orders,
and the files on charges making this collection especially useful for researchers seeking information about Bliss and some of the men who served with the 28th USCT, Company K.
SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Correspondence and Photograph

CONTENTS CONTAINER
Correspondence, 1864-65 Box 1, Folder 1
Correspondence, 1864-66 OMB0134, Folder 1
Zenas H. Bliss Photograph
Folder 1

Series 2: Departmental Office form letters and Circulars

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Assistant Quartermaster’s Office and Quartermaster
General’s Office form letters, 1865-66 Box 1, Folder 2

Department of the Interior - Pension Office Form
letter, n.d. Box 1, Folder 3

Headquarters Department of Virginia, Army of the
James - Circulars, 1865 Box 1, Folder 4

Ordnance Office – Property Returns Division form
letters, 1864-66 Box 1, Folder 5

Pay Department, U.S.A. receipt of payment, 1865 Box 1, Folder 6

Treasury Department – Second and Third Auditor’s
Office form letters, 1869-72 Box 1, Folder 7

U.S. Army General Hospital Form letters and Surgeon
General’s Office form letter, 1864-65 Box 1, Folder 8

War Department, Adjutant General’s Office form
letters, 1865 OMB0134, Folder 2
Series 3: Official Adjutant General’s Office Forms

CONTENTS
A.G.O. No. 21 Muster-in Roll of Captain Zenas H. Bliss Captain in the 28th Regiment, 1864  OMB0134, Folder 3
A.G.O. No. 40 Return of Company K, Regiment of USCT, 1864-65  OMB0134, Folder 4
A.G.O. No. 60 & 61 Muster and Descriptive Rolls, 1864-65 (and two with no date)  OMB0134
A.G.O. No. 90 & 91 Furlough Papers; and No. 99 Discharge Paper for Zenas H. Bliss, 1865  Box 1, Folder 9
A.G.O. No. 93 Voluntary Descriptive List and Account of Pay and Clothing, 1865  OMB0134, Folder 5
A.G.O. No. 104 Inventory of Effects of Late Soldier, 1865  Box 1, Folder 10
A.G.O. No. 4 & 114 Muster and Descriptive Rolls, 1864-65  OMB0134  FF 13-M, Folder 2

Series 4: Official Forms

CONTENTS
Forms 1-(a.) and 1-(b.) Quarterly Return of Ordnance and Ordnance Stores, 1864-66  OMB0134, Folder 6
Forms 2-(b.) Invoice of Ordnance and Ordnance Stores turned over to Zenas Bliss, 1864-65  Box 1, Folder 11
Forms No. 3-(a.) and No. 7-(a.) For issues or transfers of Ordnance Stores, 1865-66  Box 1, Folder 12
Forms No. 9-(a.) and No. 10-(c.) Abstract of Materials, Etc. expended or consumed, 1864-65  Box 1, Folder 13
Forms No. 12 and No. 14 Statement of Ordnance and Ordnance Stores, 1864-65  OMB0134, Folder 7
Form No. 23 Monthly Return of Quartermaster’s Stores Received and Issued, 1865  OMB0134, Folder 8
Form No. 27 list of articles transferred to Captain Zenas Bliss, 1864-65

Form No. 42 List of Stores Expended and No. 43 Articles Lost or Destroyed, 1865

Form No. 51 Monthly Return of Clothing, Camp and Garrison Equipage, 1864

Form No. 51 Monthly Return of Clothing, Camp and Garrison Equipage, 1865-66

Form No. 52 Statement exhibiting the allowance of Clothing to each soldier, 1864-65

Form No. 57 Inventory and Inspection Report, 1865

Quarterly Return of Deceased Soldiers, 1864-65

Proof of Disability Affidavits, 1891

Series 5: Official Orders, Lists, & Notes

CONTENTS

Special Orders pertaining to Captain Zenas Bliss, 1864-65

Special Orders pertaining to Privates, Commanders, and Captains, 1864-65

Special Orders pertaining to Lieutenants, 1864-65

General Orders, 1864-65

Orders, 1864-65

Charges, 1865

Lists, 1864-66, n.d.

Notes, 1865 & 1890

Photocopies of Papers gifted by Donors
CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: http://opac.indianahistory.org/
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, M1038).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.