

# 123RD ILLINOIS INFANTRY REGIMENT

The 123<sup>rd</sup> Illinois Infantry Regiment is often referred to as the "Mattoon Regiment".

The 123<sup>rd</sup> was formed on 6 September 1862 at Camp Grant, Mattoon, Colonel James Monroe, commanding. Major James Monroe transferred from the 7<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry to take command of the newly formed 123<sup>rd</sup> as the commanding officer.

The 123<sup>rd</sup> was comprised of men from Coles, Clark and Cumberland Counties. One hundred sixty-two men were from Mattoon, Companies D, H and I containing the majority of those men. The Regiment also had 14 officers from Mattoon, the highest number from Mattoon in any regiment. There were two-2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants, two-1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenants, 8-Captains, and 1-Lt Colonel, in addition to Colonel Monroe.

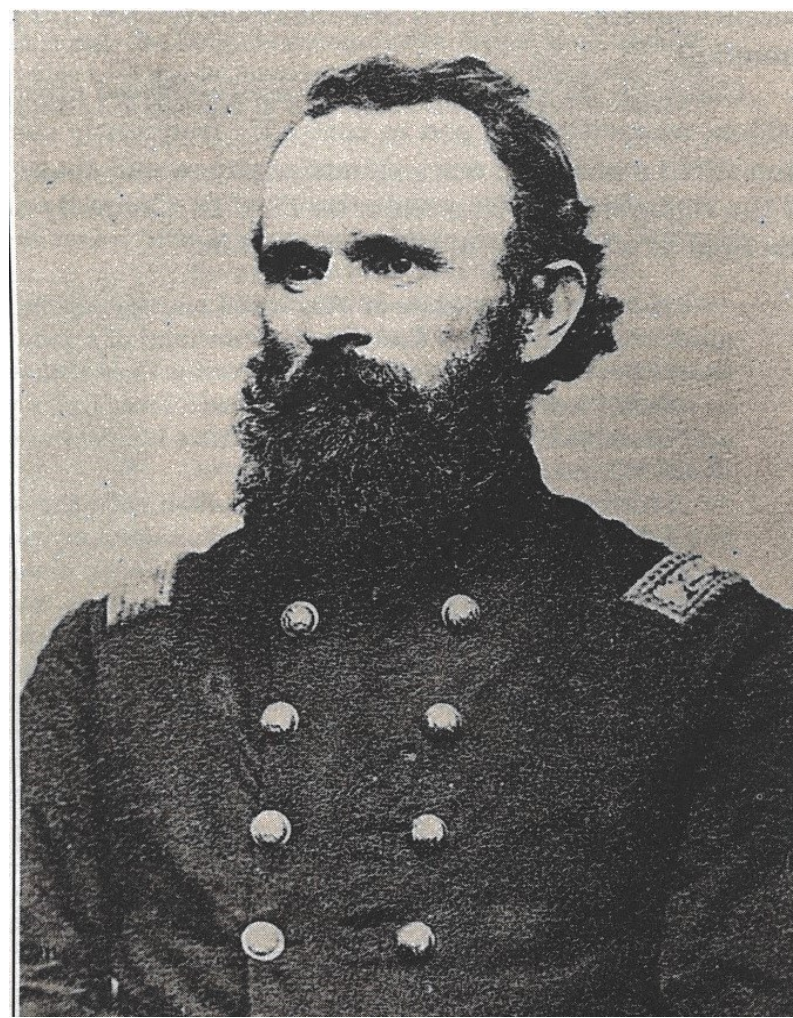
On 19 September 1862, the Regiment was loaded onto freight cars in Mattoon and transported to Louisville.

On 8 October 1862, just nineteen days after leaving Mattoon, the Regiment was engaged in the battle of Perryville, Kentucky, where it lost 36 men killed and 180 men wounded. This high casualty rate was largely attributed to the lack of experience of the Regiment, due to being rushed into battle with little training. Lt Colonel Biggs was seriously wounded at Perryville, but returned to duty and served throughout the war.

On 20 March, the Regiment was engaged in the minor battle of Vaught's Hill, where Captain A C VanBuskirk was killed. His men took up a collection to send his body back to Mattoon and he was the second person buried in the newly formed City Cemetery, on 28 March 1863.



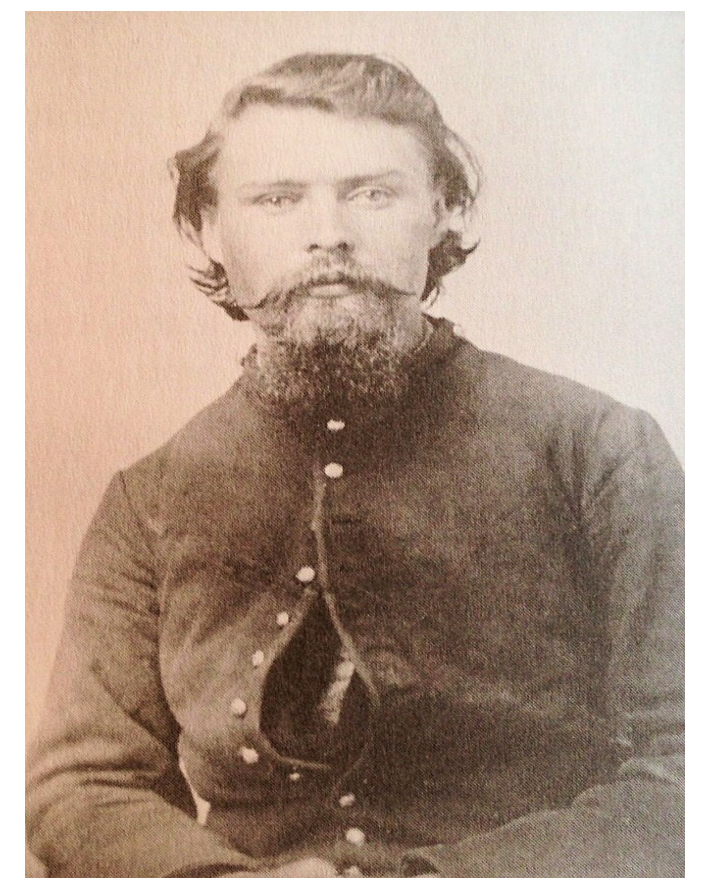
Colonel James Monroe



Lt Colonel Jonathan Biggs



John R. Apperson  
1st SGT, Co D  
KIA 17 October 1862



James K Sanders  
PVT, Co I

May 6<sup>th</sup> saw the 123<sup>rd</sup> Illinois Infantry brigaded up with the 17<sup>th</sup> and 72<sup>nd</sup> Indiana and the 98<sup>th</sup> Illinois to form what became known as the "Wilder Lightning Brigade".

The Wilder Brigade was mounted and armed with Spencer Repeating Rifles.

The Wilder Brigade was formally part of the XIV Corps but detached to serve as mobile mounted infantry. While constituted as part of the Wilder Brigade, the 123<sup>rd</sup> saw action at Hoover's Gap, the first battle that the recently issued Spencer repeating rifles played a significant role by multiplying the firepower of the regiment tremendously. The regiment also participated in the battles of Chattanooga, and Chickamauga, as well as dozens of skirmishes and minor engagements. The Brigade was operational from May through November of 1863.

Colonel James Monroe was killed in action at the battle of Farmington, Tennessee, 7 October 1863. His body was also transported back to Mattoon and is interned at Dodge Grove Cemetery.

Lt Colonel Jonathan Biggs assumed command of the Regiment upon Monroe's death. Biggs would lead the Regiment through the rest of the war, including the Atlanta Campaign. Biggs would ably lead the Regiment and receive a Brevet promotion to Brigadier General on 13 March 1865.

Other significant campaigns in which the 123<sup>rd</sup> was engaged were: Atlanta, Kennesaw Mountain, Marietta, Murfreesboro, New Hope Church, Reseca, Selma, and Stones River.

In the last months of the war, the 123<sup>rd</sup> Infantry was attached to the command of Brigadier General James H Wilson. Wilson was charged with leading a raid to destroy the Confederate arsenal at Selma, Alabama. The raid would become known as Wilson's Raid. At Selma, the Brigade engaged the legendary Confederate General, Nathan Bedford Forrest. The battle of Selma was the last significant action that the Regiment participated in, occurring on 2 April 1865, just seven days before Lee's surrender at Appomattox.

Colonel Jonathan Biggs was wounded for the third time during the battle of Selma.

The 123<sup>rd</sup> Illinois Infantry mustered out at Springfield, Illinois on 11 July 1865.

Losses for the Regiment were: 3 officers and 82 enlisted men killed and 1 officer and 133 enlisted men by disease