

CHARLES CARROLL WILLSON

The son of Thomas and Martha Willson, Charles was born in July 1843, in Dubuque, Iowa, four years after the birth of his brother Thomas. The brothers were still living in the area during the 1860 election campaign when many in the South threatened secession if Abraham Lincoln was elected. Many in the North did not take the threat seriously. It was, said the Clayton County Journal, "invented only to frighten the people into voting for the Democratic candidate." "The South will not do it because their commercial and all other interests are too closely and too intimately interwoven" with those in the North.

Lincoln was elected and, on April 12, 1861, Confederate cannon under General Pierre Beauregard fired on Fort Sumter. War followed and escalated beyond comprehension as thousands of men died from illness and wounds. More volunteers were needed and on July 9, 1862, Iowa's Governor, Sam Kirkwood, received a telegram asking him to raise five regiments as part of the President's call for another 300,000 three-year men. If the quota wasn't reached by August 15th, it "would be made up by draft" but, despite the Governor's confidence, enlistments started slowly as "farmers were busy with the harvest, the war was much more serious than had been anticipated, and the first ebullition of military enthusiasm had subsided. Furthermore, disloyal sentiment was rampant in some parts of the State."

On August 11, 1862, Charles enlisted in what would be Company F of Iowa's 21st regiment of volunteer infantry. On the 15th, he was joined by his brother. On the 22nd, they were mustered into service and ordered into quarters at Camp Franklin on Eagle Point in Dubuque where ten buildings were each twenty by sixty feet and "arranged to accommodate one hundred men each." The camp, including a parade ground and officers' quarters, was enclosed by "a line or path whereon a sentry walked his beat day and night while on guard allowing no one to pass either out or in." The regiment was mustered in on September 9th and a week later they boarded the four-year-old sidewheel steamer *Henry Clay* and two barges tied alongside and left for war.

Company muster rolls were taken bimonthly and the roll dated October 31st indicates Charles was present in Salem, Missouri, but, when the regiment left for Houston, Charles was among those too sick to travel. He rejoined the regiment in December and participated in the January 11, 1863, Battle of Hartville. As the battle wore on, Colonel Sam Merrill noticed that men were loading and firing as rapidly as possible and was concerned they would run out of ammunition while still engaged with the enemy. He ordered a withdrawal to Lebanon and from there back to Houston, but Charles was ill and remained in Lebanon. He soon joined his comrades and was with them when they moved to West Plains and from there to the northeast. Charles said they were at Thomasville when "I had just returned from outpost to the reserve picket fire the night being dark and stormy I started to go a short distance from the fire to lay down when I stepped on some object which rolled from under my feet throwing me down on the gun the hammer of the gun struck on a stone causing it to go off and wounding me in the right thumb."

Thomas was discharged for disability ("phthisis pulmonalis") on April 1, 1863, at Ste. Genevieve but Charles continued with the regiment when it was transported from there to Milliken's Bend where General Grant was assembling a large army at the start of his Vicksburg campaign. On April 12th, as part of a corps led by General John McClernand, they started a southerly movement along dirt roads, across bayous and through swamps west of the river. Charles was among many who became ill and were left behind at Somerset, the now-abandoned plantation home of Judge and Mrs. Perkins. Charles and many of the others were able to rejoin the regiment on May 15th and were present during the next day's Battle of Champion Hill although they were held out of action by General McClernand.

Charles was present during the siege of Vicksburg and, when the city surrendered on July 4th.

Subsequently, he was marked "present" on August 31st at Carrollton, Louisiana, on October 31st at Vermillion Bayou, Louisiana, and on December 31st on Matagorda Island on the gulf coast of Texas. On January 5, 1864, he was sick while the regiment was at DeCrow's Point (also known as Decros Point) but he soon rejoined the regiment where he was a headquarters guard. On the 13th he was detailed for picket duty at Pass Cavallo but the next day charges were filed indicating he "was found not pacing his beat, but seated" about 11:00 p.m. He admitted he had not been pacing and was ordered to forfeit to the hospital fund \$3.00 of his \$13.00 monthly pay and to be "publically reprimanded on dress parade."

During the following months, Charles was present with his regiment on June 30th at Terrebonne Station in southwestern Louisiana, August 31st at Morganza, Louisiana, October 31st when they camped three miles south the mouth of Arkansas' White River, December 31st at Memphis, Tennessee, and February 28, 1865, on Dauphin Island, Alabama, where they were paid while preparing to move north along the east side of Mobile Bay at the start of their successful Mobile campaign. On May 26th, after a month and a half at Spring Hill, Alabama, they were transported down Mobile Bay and across the gulf to the Lakeport Landing in Louisiana where they arrived on the 28th and Charles was admitted to the Marine U.S. General Hospital in New Orleans. There, with the war essentially over, Charles was discharged from the military pursuant to General Orders No. 48, Headquarters, Military Division of West Mississippi, that had been issued three weeks earlier.

Back in Iowa, Charles and Ellen "Ella" Prather were married on September 8, 1868, by William Carson, a minister of the gospel in Dubuque. Their only child was Elmer C. Willson.

Congress adopted numerous laws providing for pensions for veterans and their families. On April 12, 1876, Charles applied and, to prove his claim under the law then in effect, he had to show he had served at least ninety days, had received an honorable discharge and was, at least partially, disabled from performing manual labor due to wounds or illness incurred during his service. On March 9, 1876, he wrote to Iowa's Adjutant General requesting an address for the regiment's surgeon, Dr. Orr, and asked that the reply be sent to him in Waterloo.

On April 12th, Charles applied and said he was partially disabled due to the accidental wound he received in the service and said he had subsequently lived in Dubuque and Black Hawk counties and his occupation had been railroading. His application was supported by a letter from Waterloo doctor James Ball who felt Charles was 50% incapacitated and by affidavits from Dr. Orr and Company F comrades James Russell, Aaron Story, Howard Johnson and Robert Brown. The pension office was overwhelmed with applications but finally, on June 29, 1878, issued a certificate entitling Charles to \$2.00 monthly, payable quarterly.

On August 4, 1890, Charles and Ellen were living in Seattle when he applied for an increase pursuant to an Arrears Act adopted eleven years earlier. Pension surgeons agreed he was partially disabled due to the gunshot wound and other ailments and on March 8, 1893, a certificate was issued entitling Charles to \$12.00 monthly, an amount he received until his death on April 17, 1897, at 505 21st Street, Seattle. The next day, a funeral service was conducted at his home by the Stevens Post, Post No. 1, of the Grand Army of the Republic and he was buried in the city's G.A.R. Cemetery.

On the 27th, Ellen applied for the amount of Charles' pension that had accrued but was still unpaid at his death and for her own widow's pension. She had no property of any description "except a small amount of household goods which could not be sold for more than fifty dollars" and a lot in Charles' name in Blaine, Washington, that was of minimal value. On May 23, 1898, a certificate was mailed entitling her to \$8.00 monthly, payable quarterly through the local pension agency.

In 1916 Ellen gave her address as Blaine but she later moved to California. Her pension had been increased to \$40.00 monthly by the time of her death at age eighty-five on October 22, 1930, in Santa Monica where she is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery. Elmer died on June 5, 1941, and is buried in Inglewood Park Cemetery, Inglewood, California.