



Medal of Honor

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Private Henry M. Hardenburg Capturing the Flag of the 10th Alabama Infantry
Deep Bottom, 16 August 1864
by Keith Rocco

Little is known of the young man from what is now Tinley Park who was a volunteer infantryman in the Civil War and earned his nation's highest award for valor: the Medal of Honor. According to the state muster records for the unit he was in, Company G of the 39th Illinois Veteran Volunteer Infantry, Henry M. Hardenburg was born in Noble County, Indiana. When the Civil War started, he was living in the tiny Cook County town of New Bremen, which later became Tinley Park. When he enlisted on August 15, 1861, he was single, 21 years old, stood 5'9" and had light hair, blue eyes and a light complexion. His occupation was listed as a carpenter.

The Preacher's Company: Company G was known as the "Preacher's Company" because its organizer and first commanding officer, Captain William B. Slaughter, was a Methodist circuit-rider minister who traveled between Blue Island and Joliet. Many of the men in Company G came from Bremen, Orland, Palos and Worth Townships in Cook County, and Homer and New Lenox Townships in Will County. Others in the unit included Lieutenant Amos Savage, who had resigned as the Homer Township Supervisor to enlist, and Orland Township Private Thomas Humphrey, the older brother of John Humphrey, later a state Senator who's house is now an Orland Park landmark.

Early Duty: After a brush with Confederate General "Stonewall" Jackson's forces in the Shenandoah Valley and participating in the siege of Charleston, SC, Hardenburg was detailed to serve on a Requa batter. The Requa volley gun had 25 rifle barrels mounted parallel on a frame

with wheels. It could fire 175 shots per minute. In January of 1864, many of the soldiers, including Hardenburg, reenlisted. After a furlough at home, the 39th Illinois was sent to Virginia.

Hardenburg's Heroism: Starting on August 13, 1864, the regiment was involved in strategic marches during a period of terribly hot weather. The regiment started out with around 400 men but by the 16th, was down to just over 200 men. The dwindling number was not caused by enemy action, but by sun stroke and sickness. On August 16, the 39th Illinois took part in a 200 yard charge on enemy entrenchments. Despite heavy fire, the rebel fortifications were reached and overwhelmed. Hardenburg, carrying his regiment's flag, was shot in his shoulder. Another member of his regiment picked up the flag and carried it on, but Hardenburg kept going on to the enemy earthworks. There Hardenburg had a hand-to-hand struggle with the color bearer of the 10th Alabama Infantry whom he left mortally wounded and who's flag he took, according to a written account by Captain Homer Plimpton of Company G. All this happened in the first minutes of what would come to be ultimately known as the Second Battle of Deep Bottom. The fight would last for three hours with the Confederates ultimately beating back the Federals. According to the regimental history, 224 men were involved in the battle, with 104 of them either killed or wounded.

Hardenburg's Rewards: Flag captures were considered a special high honor during the Civil War, Hardenburg presented the rebel flag to his corps commander, Major General David Birney. His heroism resulted in a recommendation for a Medal of Honor. Hardenburg's gallant conduct also earned him a recommendation for an officer's commission in a U.S. Colored Regiment. Only whites served as officers in black regiments. "He has been in my company over three years and I have always found him to be a faithful and brave soldier and one who could be trusted in any place and under all circumstances," wrote Lieutenant James M. Harrington of Company G.

Hardenburg's Death: But on August 28, before receiving his first lieutenant's commission in the 36th U.S. Colored Troops, Hardenburg was killed while on picket duty. Hardenburg's Medal of Honor also was awarded posthumously on April 6, 1865. "He is silent in the grave, all unmindful of earthly rewards," Plimpton later wrote.