

Military Monday: Memorial Day and Edward A. McMurray, Jr.



Edward A. McMurray, Jr., in South Pacific or Australia, c1944.

[McMurray Family](#) *(Click for Family Tree)*

Memorial Day in the US is a day that we honor those who have served our country to preserve our freedoms. It was meant to remember our heroes that have fallen in war, and those who were lucky enough to come home, but are no longer with us.

Edward A. McMurray, Jr., is one of the latter. Despite the dangerous places he served, he was one of the lucky ones to come home, and he came home healthy.

We are all blessed to have known his quiet dignity, his honor,

and his love of this country.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. Family photo, hidden in a basement for many years.

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Tuesday's Tip: Multiple Sources Tell the Story of

William Anderson Murrell

ACT OF Feb. 6, 1907.

7/8/10 Div. 270, Ex'r.
Wilson

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
BUREAU OF PENSIONS,
Washington, D. C., July 8, 1910

Respectfully returned to the
Adjutant General U.S.A.
War Department for
personal description
of the soldier

Inv. No. 423,563.
William A. Murrell.
Co. H, 83 Ill. Vol. Inf.

PENSION
H
JUL 12 1910
U. S.
OFFICE

H. E. ...
Commissioner.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,
WASHINGTON, JUL 11 1910

Respectfully returned to the
Commissioner of Pensions,
with the information that in the case of
William Murrell
Co. H, 83 Reg't Ill. Inf.

the records show personal description as follows:
Age 21, height 5 feet, 7 inches,
complexion dark,
eyes blue hair brown,
place of birth Botetourt, Va.,
occupation farmer.

Name William A.
Murrell has not been
found on rolls of
unit Co.

PENSION
H
JUL 12 1910
U. S.
OFFICE

4 Mathewson
The Adjutant General.

Civil War pension papers of William Anderson Murrell, 11 July 1910.

[Roberts Family, Murrell Family](#) (Click for Family Tree)

Tuesday's Tip: Use multiple sources when telling the story of an ancestor. Each one may provide only a small bit of unique information, but together those tidbits can tell a compelling story. You can find more sources by researching the references cited on a website or in a book.

We learned more about William Anderson Murrell's military service by following this tip.



Guerilla warfare was a significant part of the Civil War, and William A. Murrell and his regiment, the Illinois 83rd Illinois Volunteer Infantry, provided heavy guard to the fort and surrounding areas. "The Past and Present of Warren County..." published in 1877 tells more of the story of the 83rd:

"...the whole country, especially the banks of the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, were infested with guerrillas, [and the company] had daily skirmishes with the enemy, some of them quite severe as at Waverly (Tennessee) and at Garretsburg (Kentucky)."

Skirmishes were not all that soldiers on guard duty had to deal with. Battles occurred as well.

The 3rd day of February in 1863 likely dawned cold, and possibly there was snow on the ground. By the time the sun was high in the sky, Fort Donelson and its Union forces were attacked by the rebels of Nathan Bedford Forrest and Joseph Wheeler, two of the Confederacy's best commanders. The Confederates had 8,000 men, and William most likely was one of nine companies from the 83rd, plus 1 company from the Illinois 2nd, who were able to hold off the enemy for seven hours of fighting. By 8:30pm that night, the enemy withdrew; they had 800 men killed or wounded. Of the small garrison at the fort, of the 83rd, only 13 paid the ultimate price, and 51 were wounded. The fort was still under control of the Union that evening, despite the "Battle of Dover," due to the bravery of soldiers like William A. Murrell.

After the surprising Confederate loss, it was reported that Forrest told his rival Wheeler, "Tell [General Bragg] that I will be in my coffin before I will fight again under your command."

On 20 September 1863, the right wing of the regiment moved on to Clarksville, Tennessee, but we have not been able to determine if William was a part of this group. He most likely did end up in Clarksville at some point, however, per regimental histories.

Despite their hatred for each other, the Confederate officers Forrest and Wheeler were involved together in other battles with Union forces. One of their missions was to disrupt the communications of General Sherman as he marched through the south. The Illinois 83rd out of Clarksville pursued the rebel forces, and were involved in many skirmishes and fights.

During 1864, the 83rd Illinois was guarding over 200 miles of Union communications (telegraph, railroad, waterways, roads, etc.), and much heavy patrol duty was required to keep those lines in Union hands. An Adjutant General's report on the Illinois 83rd told the story of one of the forays after the rebels:

“On the morning of the 20th of August, 1864, Captain William M. Turnbull, of Company B, with eleven of his company, left Fort Donelson in pursuit of a party of five guerrillas, who were making their way to the Tennessee River with a lot of horses, but failing to overtake them he was overpowered while returning to his command by a party of guerrillas secreted in the timber, and he and seven of his men were killed, while one had both his legs broken, but he was afterward cowardly murdered by guerrillas, who found him lying helpless in a barn where some humane citizen had taken him for safety. But three of the party escaped to tell the sad fate of their companions.”

(Wonder if there was any retribution by the guerrillas to the person who had helped the Union soldier to the barn? Sadly, it was highly likely...)

We know that William was probably not a part of this event, since he was in Co. H, not Co. B. Some of the young men of Co. B were from Roseville, however, and William may have known them. Even if he did not, hearing this story as the three survivors returned must have been frightening to 23-year old William and his fellow soldiers.

The winter of 1864-5 found the regiment in Nashville, Tennessee, on provost duty. This was essentially a 'military police' job, requiring them to keep order and discipline within the Union troops of the city.

The war was coming to a close, and that meant that William Anderson Murrell and his regiment were about to be mustered out of the Union Army. Colonel Arthur A. Smith, the commanding general of the Illinois 83rd, received the following letter commending his troops:

HEADQUARTERS DISTRICT OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE

Nashville, Tenn., May 31, 1865

Colonel A. A. Smith, Commanding Fifth Sub. District Middle Tennessee.

Dear Colonel – By an order just received the troops of 1862 will be mustered out of services. Your Regiment will go out under that order. I am unwilling to part with you and your officers and men without expressing my highest commendation of the soldierly bearing and gentlemanly conduct of all during the time they have been under my command. At the time when I most needed brave men and steady soldiers to drive Wheeler and Forrest out of the district I was but too happy to avail myself of the services of as many of your Regiment as could be spared for that duty. And relying greatly upon them I was not disappointed in their

deportment.

I have not been troubled with complaints against them for disorderly conduct and marauding, but their deportment in the army and community has been brave and soldierly, proving that the brave man and true soldier is always honest and just. I can truly say I do not know a regiment in the service whose brave and soldierly bearing more fully entitles it to the respect and gratitude of the country than the Eighty-third Infantry, and you and they will take with you, individually and collectively, my sincere thanks for your efficient services and my kindest wishes for your future welfare in all things.

I am, Colonel, very truly, etc.

Lovel H. Rosseau.

Major General Commanding

William and his brothers in arms were officially mustered out on 26 June 1865 at Nashville. They were moved to Chicago, Illinois, and received their discharge and final pay on 4 July 1865. What a true day of independence that was for all the soldiers discharged!



One fun and interesting tidbit that we did learn about William's unit, following today's tip about exploring a variety of sources:

Many of the young men enlisted in Co. C of the 83rd Illinois were from Roseville, Illinois. So William may have had some dealings with the men in this unit, whether because he knew them personally or because they went out on patrol together,

and lived together in the small garrison. One of the soldiers in Co. C, from Pella, Iowa, was Virgil Walter Earp. You might now be thinking of Wyatt Earp, the famous marshall who was involved in the gunfight at the O.K. Corral years later in Tombstone, Arizona. They were actually brothers, but Virgil was the more experienced with guns and had served longer as a lawman. Virgil was officially the City Marshal for Tombstone and a Deputy U.S. Marshal; he made his brother Wyatt an Assistant Deputy before the shootout in 1881, as well as their brother Morgan Earp and Doc Holliday. It may have been Virgil that fired the first shot in the shootout. His brother Wyatt, who spent most of his life as a gambler, got all the glory instead after a fictionalized biography called *Wyatt Earp: Frontier Marshal* by Stuart N. Lake was published in 1931.

It would be interesting to know William A. Murrell's reaction when he heard the O.K. Corral shootout story and the name of a member of the Illinois 83rd...

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. 83rd Illinois Infantry Regiment— https://civilwar.illinoisgenweb.org/reg_html/083_reg.html
2. 83rd Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment—https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/83rd_Illinois_Volunteer_Infantry_Regiment
3. Civil War Archive- 83rd regiment Infantry— <http://www.civilwararchive.com/Unregfst/unilinf7.htm#83rd>
4. Fort Donelson Battlefield- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Donelson_National_Battlefield
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Donelson
<https://www.nps.gov/fodo/index.htm>
5. Virgil Earp—https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgil_Earp

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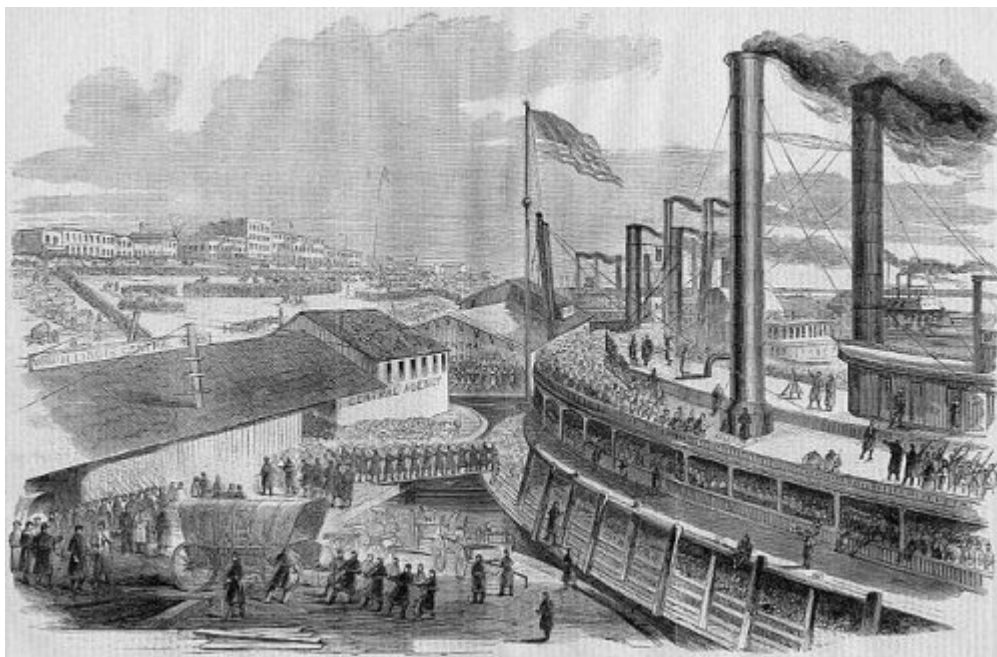
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Military Monday: William Anderson Murrell

Virginians, and they most likely realized that war would be coming to their own soil if the divisive forces of the slavery and states' rights issues persisted. We cannot know if states' rights or slavery was the uppermost issue on their minds, or if just protecting family and assets were of primary importance. Roseville, in Warren County, Illinois, was a stop on the Underground Railroad for many runaway slaves on their way to freedom in the north or Canada, so the area they chose to settle was anti-slavery. We do know that William took a stand on the issues, as he enlisted in the Union Army on 1 August 1862.

William enlisted with other young men from Warren County at Monmouth, Illinois as the 83rd Infantry Illinois Volunteers was being organized. He became a part of Company H (all from Warren Co.) and was enlisted for three years of service.

The 83rd moved out of Monmouth on 25 August 1862, going to Cairo, Illinois via Burlington, Illinois and St. Louis, Missouri. Cairo (pronounced "CARE-o" by the locals) is across the border from Kentucky and at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, so it was important for the unit to protect Union assets. Guard duty of communications lines was one of their primary missions.



Embarkation of General McClelland's Brigade at Cairo – the Advance of the Great Mississippi Expedition – January 10,

1862, a wood engraving from a sketch by Alexander Simplot, published in Harper's Weekly, February 1, 1862, via Wikipedia, public domain. (William may have been transported on a similar steamboat.) (Click to enlarge.)

The above scene was from before William arrived in Cairo, and after Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant had taken the southernmost city of Illinois from the Confederates. Grant also took Fort Donelson, along the Cumberland River in Tennessee, in February 1862. As it was just over ten miles from Kentucky, this was a huge strategic win for the Union, and the South was stunned. The Cumberland was a route for men and supplies into Tennessee and the heart of the Confederacy. This battle essentially divided the rebellious states into two sections, making it easier for the Union to attack and control. And that the Union did- Nashville, Tennessee, fell to Grant shortly thereafter. Nashville was an industrial center as well as the capital of Tennessee, and its occupation by the Union also gave them control over much of the Tennessee River. The Union held Nashville throughout the war.

William and his fellow soldiers were moved to Fort Donelson, near Dover, Tennessee, about the 5th of September, 1862.



Part of the lower river battery, overlooking the Cumberland River. Photographed by Hal Jespersen at Fort Donelson, February 2006, via Wikipedia; public domain.

On 20 September 1863, the right wing of the regiment moved on to Clarksville, Tennessee, but we have not been able to determine if William was a part of this group.

To be continued..

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. 83rd Illinois Infantry Regiment–
<https://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/databases/reghist.pdf> https://civilwar.illinoisgenweb.org/reg_html/083_reg.html
2. 83rd Illinois Volunteer Infantry Regiment–https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/83rd_Illinois_Volunteer_Infantry_Regiment
3. Interestingly, there was a young man named Ransom Roberts in Co. H with William- could he have been a cousin through William's sister Elizabeth's marriage to John Roberts? There was a Joseph H. Saylor, also from Roseville- John Roberts' mother's maiden name was Saylor/Salyers, so he too may have been a cousin through marriage (or a marriage to be.) More research needed here as neither of these names are known to the author.
4. Civil War Archive- 83rd regiment Infantry– <http://www.civilwararchive.com/Unregfst/unilinf7.htm#83rd>
5. Fort Donelson Battlefield- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Donelson_National_Battlefield
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Donelson
<https://www.nps.gov/fodo/index.htm>

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Sorting Saturday: Armed Forces Day



Edward A. McMurray, Jr., 1943, likely taken in boot camp at Ft. Leonard Wood in Missouri.

[McMurray Family](#) *(Click for Family Tree)*

Today, the third Saturday in May, is Armed Forces Day in the United States. It is a day to honor our military service members in all five branches of the service: Navy, Air Force, Marines, Army, and Coast Guard. So it was somewhat serendipitous that while sorting through and organizing computer files today, this image surfaced.

Edward A. McMurray, Jr., (1924-2010) served his country proudly in World War II in the Army-Air Corps. He was an aircraft mechanic in the South Pacific. He told his family that the Marines would go in and take a little Pacific Island from the Japanese, the Army would secure it, the Navy Seebes would bulldoze a landing strip, and the Air Corps pilots

landed their airships and mechanics were brought in to service the planes. Barracks, hangars, and supply areas were quickly built, all with a wide strip bulldozed between them and the jungle. They knew the Japanese were often still out in the jungle, as they could hear them at night rustling through the vegetation. If the men had not worked so hard during the hot, stifflingly-humid days with frequent rain showers, sleep might have been a problem with knowing the enemy was just outside the compound, waiting for a chance to attack.

Although they were not in combat, their work itself was inherently dangerous. A pit was dug for scrapping used oil, rags, engine parts, and sometimes the airmen had to get down in there to try to find a needed part or push things closer together so they could continue to add to the pile. One day Ed was taking a break, and the pit caught on fire, possibly from a lit cigarette. He said that he was supposed to have been working in the pit at that time, but was 'goofing off' – hard to imagine as he was SUCH a hard worker his whole life, even as a young boy per his mother! Sadly, it was impossible to rescue all the men in the pit, and Ed said the screams and the smell of burning flesh would always remain with him. It must have been horrific for all concerned. Ed may have been just barely 20 when it happened, and although he was a stoic individual, this incident affected him even into his later years.

As Ed was stationed in the South Pacific, they were frequently on board ship, heading to the next small island that had been laboriously taken by our combat troops. Ed said they frequently lost men overboard when it was rough, or sometimes even in calm seas from a misstep on the deck. At night it would have been almost impossible to find a man treading water in the ocean. It was challenging during the day, too, as it often was some time before it was realized that a man was missing. Ed also spoke of the sharks that followed the ships (partly because they threw their waste overboard). It was

especially frightening around the Great Barrier Reef of Australia- he said a man did not have much of a chance of survival flailing around in the water there. That being said, they did all go swimming at times off the aft deck of their ship. Ah, the joys of youth and a feeling of immortality, even in wartime.

So thank a Veteran today, and think about those who came before, those who are serving us today, and those who will serve in the future to protect our freedoms. Think about those who did not come back home too, whether they were serving overseas, or on our own land in the French-Indian Wars, the American Revolution, the War of 1812, or our bloodiest war, the Civil War. We need to honor them all, every day- and especially today, on Armed Forces Day.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. Portrait from our family treasure chest of photos.
2. See also "[Veteran's Day: Honoring Edward A. McMurray, Jr.](#)", "[Military Monday: Edward A. McMurray, Jr. in the Pacific Theater of WWII](#)", and "[Edward A. McMurray, Jr. at the Surrender of Japan, 02 Sep 1945](#)".

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Tombstone Tuesday: Henry Clay Christie



Henry C. Christy, military headstone, in Evans Cemetery, Monroe County, Iowa. Posted from Find A Grave with kind permission of photographer.

[Roberts Family](#) *(Click for Family Tree)*



Henry C. Christy, headstone, in Evans Cemetery, Monroe County, Iowa. Posted from Find A Grave with kind permission of photographer.



Evans Cemetery, Monroe County, Iowa. Posted from Find A Grave with kind permission of photographer.



Henry C. Christie, military monument, in Evans Cemetery, Monroe County, Iowa. Posted from Find A Grave with kind permission of photographer.



Henry C. Christie, military monument, closeup, in Evans Cemetery, Monroe County, Iowa. Posted from Find A Grave with kind permission of photographer.

Notes, Sources, and References:

1. All images posted from Find A Grave with kind permission of photographer.
2. Note that surname is spelled "Christy" on military headstone, but family monument and large military monument spell it, "Christie."

Please contact us if you would like higher resolution images. Click to enlarge images.

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