



David Hamilton Morton  
149<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry

Writing to Pennsylvania's Governor Andrew Curtin after the conclusion of the Peninsula campaign, Colonel Hugh McNeil lauded the services of a battalion of his 'Bucktails,' who had served as skirmishers and sharpshooters during the recent fighting. McNeil praised both officers and men, and suggested that, "A Bucktail Brigade of light infantry would reflect additional honor on the old Commonwealth." McNeil was only weeks away from his death at Antietam.

Curtin quickly approved McNeil's recommendation. In three weeks, more than enough companies had been recruited to organize two complete regiments: the 149<sup>th</sup> and 150<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteers. Plans to form additional regiments for a full brigade were disrupted by Lee's invasion of Maryland. The 149<sup>th</sup> and 150<sup>th</sup> Regiments were ordered to Washington, D.C.

Left behind were miscellaneous companies of would-be "Bucktails." Eventually these units were assigned, much chagrined, to other regiments.

One volunteer lucky enough to be assigned to the 149<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania was David H. Morton, a 19-year old from the village of Bethel, Allegheny County. On August 22,

1862, Morton signed the roll presented to him by Captain James Glenn. Glenn's recruits became Company D of the 149<sup>th</sup>.

As part of the Army of the Potomac's First Corps, the 149<sup>th</sup> did only a bit of skirmishing in their initial combat at Chancellorsville. Two months later at Gettysburg, however, the men of the 149<sup>th</sup> saw enough fighting to earn them veteran's status by anyone's standards – even the original Bucktails, who heretofore had consistently referred to these upstart regiments as “bogus Bucktails.” The 149<sup>th</sup> suffered grievous casualties in the first day's fight and were the last to be driven from McPherson's Ridge. In all, the 149<sup>th</sup> lost 34 killed, 171 wounded and 131 missing during the campaign.

The next serious bloodletting for the Bucktails began in May 1864, when U.S. Grant set out to defeat or grind away his opponent. Fighting furiously in the Wilderness and at Laurel Hill, Virginia, the 149<sup>th</sup> incurred crippling casualties.

Then on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, during one of Grant's flank moves, the regiment crossed the North Anna River and headed for a small woods in which to camp. There the enemy lay in wait. Shots rang out. A few men fell. The Bucktails drew back a short distance, then checked the enemy. The skirmish petered out. Bucktail losses totaled 4 dead, 16 wounded, 10 prisoners.

One of the wounded was David Morton, whose previous good fortune ended with a rebel bullet in the leg. The efficient Union system for removing casualties managed to return Morton to Washington, D.C., but physicians there were unable to save his life. He died on June 6 and was buried at Arlington.

Years later at a reunion of the 149<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania, a survivor of Company D spoke of Morton's honorable service. Sgt. John Nesbit concluded his remarks with the observation, “If I were called upon, with the experience of three years of active army service, after these long years of study and reflection and with the light of history to assist me to select an example of a brave, conscientious, Christian American boy, who knew and believed in the cause for which he was fighting and for which he gave up his life, I would select and place on such a list the name of David Hamilton Morton.”

- *Timothy Brookes*

*David Morton's photo is published through the courtesy of sculptor James Nathan Muir,  
a collateral descendant of Morton.*