



For Immediate Release:

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**"Sometimes puts a Soldier's powers of Endurance to a severe test"**

*Civil War diary written by Salem, Illinois native donated to Presidential Library and Museum*

SPRINGFIELD - He went in as a private and emerged a surgeon, and along the way kept a day by day account of his experiences during some of the major campaigns of the American Civil War. Now, the diary kept by Salem, Illinois native Dr. James A. Black has been donated by Benita K. Moore and David G. Moore to the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield.

"The James Black diary brings the war down to a personal level, as he tells of the day to day experiences of common people caught up in this huge conflict," said Illinois State Historian Dr. Thomas Schwartz. "It is a direct link to our past, allowing us to better understand this critical period in our history as we approach the 150th anniversary of the Civil War."

The handwritten diary transcribed during the Civil War by Black from his field notes has entries for every day from January 1, 1862 through December 31, 1865. It includes Black's observations of daily life as a Union soldier, and his unvarnished opinions about generals, army life, and the horrors of war. The diary was obtained by Benita and David Moore of Galesburg from one of Black's descendants. Benita is a native of Salem, Illinois and David is a native of Jacksonville, Illinois.

James A. Black was born in 1835 in Salem, Illinois. Although he had prior medical experience, Black wanted to be a soldier for the Union cause rather than a doctor, so entered the Union Army on January 1, 1862 as an infantry private. He was mustered into the 49th Illinois Infantry at Camp Butler near Springfield along with other men in the unit who hailed mainly from southwest and south central Illinois. His unit fought in the battles at Fort Donelson and Shiloh. A month after Shiloh, Black was sent to a field hospital after becoming ill. There, observing the hospital conditions, Black volunteered to use his prior medical experience to help doctors care for other sick and injured patients, and so impressed the medical staff that they encouraged him to take the required military test to become a doctor. Black realized his medical skills could be more useful to the Union cause than his service as an infantryman, so he passed the test on December 25, 1862 and was made Assistant Surgeon for the 49th Illinois. The Assistant Surgeon was the person who provided what is now known as triage care on the battlefield for the men of the unit.

Black continued to see action with his unit in western Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana and Missouri, fighting under Generals Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman, among others. He participated in the Meridian and Red River campaigns, fought in the Battle of Nashville, and was part of a group that pursued Confederate troops across Missouri when it was feared they would invade southern Illinois.

Selected entries from Black's diary follow.

*February 4, 1862, Cairo, Illinois:* We arrived here at 8 a.m. today unloaded our baggage and stores and put it aboard a boat and crossed the Ohio to Fort Holt Ky. at 4 p.m. unloaded again, and went into log barracks left by some other Reg't. The Situation is low, and the river almost full bank at this place. Many men of the regiment very drunk today. Cairo muddy.

*February 13, 1862, Fort Donelson, Tennessee:* Up at daylight, and formed at Sunup in ¼ mile of the rebel works. In the front line at 8 a.m., maneuvered until noon. At 1 p.m. we were moved up under cover of brush, very close to the rebel works, then charged to within 30 yards of the Rebel works, and held the position one hour and ten minutes. Capt. J.W. Brokaw was killed, Jake Moore, O'Neill, Bishop, Smith Taylor Weldon Barton and Sawyer were severely wounded, of Co. "D" Col. Morrison was wounded & taken off the field. The Reg't lost 14 men killed, 37 wounded, and \_\_\_\_ missing.

*February 16, 1862, Fort Donelson, Tennessee:* The Fort was Surrendered at an early hour this morning with 15,000 prisoners. The troops that were engaged in the fight marched into the works and viewed the fortification and their contents. The Rebels standing by way side our band playing "Dixie." We stacked arms & I eat dinner with some Rebels in their camp today.

*April 7, 1862, Shiloh, Tennessee:* Ordered to "move steadily forward and retake the ground we lost yesterday," by Gen'l John A. McClernand. Joined on the left of Gen'l Smith's command. Supported artillery awhile, then crossed an open field under the enemy's fire of grape & canister almost to their guns, then ordered to recross the field. Then we moved to the left obliquely and attacked and drove the enemy beyond our camp. Fresh troops pressed them farther. We halted at our camp. The Reg't lost 17 killed and 99 wounded.

*May 29, 1862, Camp near Corinth, Mississippi:* Col. L.F. Ross fired artillery over us at a rebel Picket post, there was heavy firing in the direction of Corinth, and Picket firing on the lines during the day...the Pickets got too friendly along the line, and would meet, and trade knives and play poker. Ross broke it up.

*October 31, 1862, Salem, Illinois:* There was many a tearful eye to-day, at the final parting. To soldier at home is romantic; -- but to take up the line of march, for an enemy's country; -- for the tented field, with its hardships, exposures, and privations, perhaps for the battlefield, is of very serious import, - comparing this scene, with that of the departure of other Regiments; that went to the scene of action, one short year ago; with equal numbers, vigor, and strength, and can now muster but half those numbers, tell but too plainly, that this parting, may well be serious. They left about noon. I returned to town, and spent a lonely evening, as most every person with whom, I met, was melancholy.

*December 31, 1862, Bethel, Tennessee:* I have now been in the capacity of a Soldier one year today, and many and varied have been the scenes, circumstances, and vicissitudes of that short period of my life, perhaps there has been more of human nature learned in that year than the balance of my life.

*September 30, 1863, Little Rock, Arkansas:* During the past month we have had some hard service. Marching during very hot Weather, over very dusty roads, finding water very scarce and also very bad, and yet making very long and hard marches, without any necessity Existing for it. And it has told seriously on the health of the Command. When we reached Clarendan on White River, the health of our regiment was Excellent, and by the time we reached Brownsville, we had very many sick men in camp and several deaths in consequence of the unnecessary hard campaigning under circumstances.

*April 30, 1864, Alexandria, Louisiana:* I bought a pair of boots yesterday for \$12.00. Soldiers have to pay exorbitant prices for every thing bought of sutlers here – a month ago we were at Catile Landing on our way up the river, thinking there was sufficient rebel force west of the Mississippi river to seriously impede our progress. But it seems we failed to accomplish the objects of the Expedition, but it is generally conceded to be more from the stupidity and incompetency of our General (N.P. Banks) than from the Numerical strength of the rebel force, or the Extraordinary generalship of the opposing Commanders. The Campaign has Cost heavily in Men & Means. In Men by casualties of battle but, worse, in the impaired health of the troops – to say nothing of the vast expense, to the Government – in supplying the fleet – and Army for so long a time.

*June 30, 1864, Salem, Illinois:* One month ago we were at Vicksburg anxiously awaiting orders to come up the river to Memphis and two months ago we were at Alexandria La. with but little knowledge of when we would get out of that disastrous Campaign. It requires a good share of equanimity to patiently endure all the vicissitudes of war, and by the way the active campaigning and fighting even, is not always the hardest part of the service, but laying at some out of the way, place, where mails, and news, are not obtainable, and no known object for remaining at the place, with its attendant inconveniences and embarrassments, sometimes puts a Soldier's powers of Endurance to a severe test.

Following the war, Black was assigned to a medical post in Kentucky, and soon thereafter set up a private medical practice in Fillmore (Montgomery County) Illinois. Dr. Black moved his practice to Bond County, where he served residents as a country doctor until his death in 1902.

The printed version of the diary, *A Civil War Diary – January 1, 1862 – December 31, 1865: Written by Dr. James A. Black, First Assistant Surgeon, 49th Illinois Infantry*, transcribed and edited by Benita K. Moore, may be purchased from the Museum Gift Shop at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum.

The Black diary joins 122 Civil War diaries and 400 collections with a Civil War component in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum's collection. The library is the nation's chief historical and genealogical research facility for all aspects of Illinois history, and is one of the top institutions for those researching the Civil War era. For more information, visit [www.presidentlincoln.org](http://www.presidentlincoln.org).

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