Willis James Watts

Private, Company G, 1st Texas Infantry Regiment

2nd Cousin, 4 Times Removed of John Stevens

Bio of Willis James Watts

Willis James Watts was born in Sumter County, South Carolina on September 18, 1838, to Alexander and Martha Watts. In the early 1950's the family migrated to Anderson County, Texas. In 1860, Willis lived in Hill County, Texas and working as a horse breaker. The same year he enlisted in a company of Texas Rangers. Soon after the CW began, Willis intended to join a cavalry company being organized in Hill County. Before leaving, he took a personal trunk of belongings to his parent's home in Anderson County. Soon after reaching home, he became extremely ill and did not recover until the spring of 1862. During his illness, Willis wrote two letters explaining why he was unable to report for duty.

Captain John R. Woodward of Company G of the 1st Texas Infantry had returned to Anderson County to enlist new recruits. In April 1862, Willis, his 17-year-old brother A. J. "Sandy" Watts, and two first cousins, Fredrick and Frank Watts enlisted in Captain Woodward's company. Soon after arriving in Virginia, Willis and Sandy were sick in the hospital and Frank died of measles.

At the Battle of Sharpsburg, Willis was still in the hospital. Sandy was severely wounded in the shoulder and Fredrick was wounded in the arm and captured. Fredrick's arm was amputated and he was paroled. Another first cousin, Julius Watts, was also in Hood's Brigade, but in Company C of Hampton's Legion of SC Infantry. He was wounded in the arm which was amputated and died a few months later.

At the Battle of Gettysburg, Willis was one of the color guards for George Branard during the attack on Houck's Ridge. Both Willis and Sandy were wounded at the Battle of Chickamauga.

At the Battle of the Wilderness, Willis was severely wounded by a minnie ball in the left arm, but it was not amputated. Sandy was shot in the knee which resulted in a rigid leg for the rest of his life. Although he had limited use of his arm, Willis returned to the regiment and was at New Market Heights and the defenses of Richmond.

In March of 1865, Willis wrote a letter describing some of his service and how small the brigade had become. He stated that he had been wounded seven times, five by shrapnel and twice by minnie balls. He also wrote that the remaining men of the brigade would “average two scars per man.” Of the five Watts men who served in Hood’s Brigade, Willis was the only member present and paroled at Appomattox.

Instead of returning home immediately, he went to South Carolina where many Watts’ family members still lived. He married Margaret S. Smith in 1865 in South Carolina and returned to Texas in 1866. His second marriage was to Lydia Jane Phelps.

Willis lived in Anderson County until his death in January 1918. Over the years he attended several reunions with the other veterans. In 1914, Willis was the president of the old Hood’s Texas Brigade Reunion at Ennis, Texas.