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Diary, 1863, of Marquis Lafayette Holt

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Diary, 1863, documents the military service of Marquis Lafayette Holt (1845–1934) with Company E, Third Regiment, New Hampshire Infantry along the coast of South Carolina. A native of Nelson, Cheshire County, New Hampshire, Marquis Lafayette Holt was the son of Hiram Holt (1807–1894) and Rowena Breed (1809–1888). Holt enlisted as a private in August 1861 and was promoted to corporal a year later in August 1862. Following his re-enlistment in February 1864 he was promoted to sergeant and was finally commissioned as first lieutenant in April 1865 just before he was mustered out of service in July 1865. Though his entries are brief, Holt's daily diary provides details regarding camp life and his unit's involvement in operations in Charleston harbor during the summer of 1863.

When Holt began his entries on 1 January 1863, the Third New Hampshire was stationed on Hilton Head. The island had fallen to Union forces in November 1861 and soon became a major military outpost supporting the naval blockade and operations against South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. The Third New Hampshire had arrived at Hilton Head shortly after its capture by Union forces but had seen no major action until the Battle of Secessionville on James Island in June 1862, where they were heavily engaged and suffered 104 casualties—including twenty-seven killed.

The regiment then settled into camp life on Hilton Head for almost a year. During the early months of 1863, Holt spent his days drilling, writing letters and his diary, watching the ships come into the harbor, playing "ball," reading, and attending prayer services. The unit was also constructing its own "meeting house," which Holt first mentioned on 5 January. The building was finished by 14 January, and on that day, Holt reported that he and "quite a number" attended a "preyr meeting in our new house" and that "it seemed like old times." On 7 March, the church was formally organized and received twelve members. He was frequently designated as corporal of one of the guard reliefs and dutifully recorded that evening's countersign and tasks associated with the duty. Typical of these entries were three nights in February. On the third, he had to "serch the quarters for liquor...but found none;" on the 16th he "arrested a couple of teamsters" at "the Head" for unspecified reasons; and on the 22nd he "arrested one of the carpenters for having liquor."

On 3 April, the regiment boarded the transport ship *Mary A. Boardman* and sailed for Charleston harbor, arriving in the Stono Inlet two days later. This movement was part of what became known as the First Battle of Charleston Harbor, a naval bombardment of Confederate defenses guarding the entrance to the harbor. The main attack took place on 7 April 1863, with no involvement from the army. Holt simply recorded that there was "heavy firing towards Charleston this afternoon," and reported "one Monitor sunk and one injured." After only two hours of fire, the Union ships withdrew with the ironclad *Keokuk* being hit by nearly ninety shells and most of the other ships damaged. The *Keokuk* sank off Morris Island the following day, and her guns were eventually salvaged by Confederate forces for use in their coastal defenses. Holt and the Third New Hampshire landed on Folly Island on 9 April and "laid on shore" throughout the night in anticipation of renewed attacks. However, due to the damage sustained by the Union bombarding fleet on 7 April, the attack was called off. The men again boarded the transport on 10 April and the following day "weighed anchor and started for Hilton Head at noon."

Holt passed the following months in a similar manner as those earlier in the year—drill, dress parade, and small amusements including sitting for his photograph on 21 April, fishing for crabs on 12 May, participating in an unsuccessful deer hunt with "Major Plimpton[,] Capts Ela & Burnam[,] and Lieutenant Dove and 3 men from each company" on 20 May, and finding "a turtles nest with 138 eggs" on 14 June.

Camp duties and these diversions would end on 3 July when the Third New Hampshire received "orders to be ready to leave at 9 oc." The men boarded the steamer *Boston* that night, and on 5 July once again arrived on Folly Island. There they unloaded their gear and "marched about 2 miles to the camp" of the Sixth Regiment, Connecticut Infantry, where they "laid...untill about 10 oc" before moving "to our camp ground" before dark. By 10 July, the Third New Hampshire was in place on the "uper end

of Folly” with the other units of George C. Strong’s Brigade (the Seventh Regiment, Connecticut Infantry, the Ninth Regiment, Maine Infantry, and the Seventy-sixth Regiment, Pennsylvania Infantry). Union batteries “opened at sunrise” on Battery Wagner on Morris Island, and “after a couple of hours bombardment” Strong’s Brigade landed. Holt reported that “assisted by the howitzer boats we drove the enemy into Wagner.” After laying “behind sand bluffs” all night, the Third New Hampshire “formed at day light and marched in resirve toward Wagner” on the morning of 11 July. The Seventh Connecticut led the assault on Wagner, but, as Holt succinctly summarized, were “repulsed.” He then stated that they “went back to our former position and stoped their all day strengthening our rifle pits” under brisk fire “all day from Gregg, Wagner & Sumter.” This first assault on Battery Wagner resulted in 339 Union casualties, including seven killed and twenty-one wounded from the Third New Hampshire. The regiment “laid in the pits” under fire on 12 and 13 July, coming out “on fatigue...building a battery,” but were relieved on the afternoon of 14 July and “marched to the rear as far as Greggs Hill and encamped for the night.” Holt was back in the line of battle by 16 July but had been detailed for guard duty when the more famous second assault on Battery Wagner took place on 18 July 1863. He noted that during this assault the “54th Mass took the advance,” but were “repulsed with a heavy loss.” The Fifty-fourth Regiment, Massachusetts Infantry was made up of Black soldiers led by white officers and suffered nearly three hundred casualties during the assault on the Confederate fort. Holt’s own regiment, the Third New Hampshire, had eight men killed during the attack.

Two days after the assault on Battery Wagner, on 20 July 1863, Holt was back on the front lines where he would remain under fire until mid-September except for occasional days of relief. He dutifully recorded his location in relation to the Union batteries, which Confederate forts were firing on a particular day, and those killed and wounded in his regiment.

On 18 September 1863, he received orders “to get ready to go home on a furlough,” and left Hilton Head the following day. Other than his seasickness, Holt recorded little of his journey to New York. He arrived in the city on 23 September, “got dinner at the New England rooms,” and immediately secured transportation to Boston. He arrived home in Mason, New Hampshire the following day and spent the next twenty days visiting friends and family, attending church, and hunting. He arrived back on Morris Island on 24 October 1863 and witnessed the renewed bombardment of Fort Sumter. By 28 October, the Confederate fort looked “most like a pile of rubbish.” Holt soon fell back into the routine of camp life digging wells, parading, and drilling. Early in the morning of 20 November 1863 he participated in a planned assault on Fort Sumter, but the attacking party was turned back when “with in 200 yards of the fort when the rebs opened on us.” Holt’s year ended quietly. For Christmas he received a “letter from Mother with a diary.” A diary volume was evidently a regular gift—the front of his 1863 diary contained a note from his sister Emma imploring that “if God in mercy preserves you untill the end of another year return it to me with every blank filled.” **Acquired for the Library by the University South Caroliniana Society.**