

TYSON (ROBERT A.) DIARY

Mss. 1693

Inventory

Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections
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Louisiana State University Libraries
Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University

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SUMMARY

Size.	1 manuscript volume
Geographic locations.	Alexandria; Morganza; Port Hudson; Natchitoches, Louisiana
Inclusive dates.	1863-1864
Bulk dates.	N/A
Language.	English
Summary.	Diary of Robert Tyson, Union soldier, recounts his experience working with African American troops and his participation in Civil War battles in Louisiana.
Restrictions on access.	If microfilm is available, photocopies must be made from microfilm.
Related collections.	None.
Copyright.	Copyright of the original materials is retained by descendants of the creators in accordance with U.S. copyright law.
Citation.	Robert A. Tyson Diary, Mss. 1693, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.
Stack location.	M:18
Also available on.	Mss.MF:T

BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL NOTE

Robert A. Tyson was a Federal soldier in the 46th Indiana Regiment stationed in Louisiana during the Civil War. He purchased this diary in New Orleans, December 7, 1863. Tyson had evidently re-enlisted as a veteran private soldier, and soon after the diary commences, he makes application for a commission. His commission as 2nd Lieutenant in the Corps d'Afrique of Banks' army was granted in March 1864. Tyson participated in General Nathaniel Banks' Red River Campaign.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The diary (January-December 1864) relates Tyson's military duties and experiences with African American troops during the Red River Expedition and in the area of Morganza, Pointe Coupee Parish. Entries tell of Tyson's assignment to gather and guard African Americans who joined Union camps, designated by the Federal troops "recruits" or "contrabands." He describes camp life and skirmishes during the march of Banks' army from Natchitoches to Mansfield and in retreat to Grand Ecore. He further describes the destruction and looting by Federal troops during their retreat from Alexandria. From June through December, Tyson was stationed at Morganza in command of Company F, 92nd United States Colored Troops, and commissioned to assist in the construction of forts along the Atchafalaya River.

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

At Algiers, January 1-28, 1864

Relates re-enlistment in 46th Indiana Regiment. Notes that many of the boys in his regiment are “attacked by syphilis.” Comments on the “Basket Brigade” or peddlers who sell their wares at camp.

At Lake Pontchartrain, January 29, 1864

His company received orders to remain in quarters pending its transfer to Lake Pontchartrain. Relates that Hankins Smith defied orders, went to town, and was punished by having his hands and feet tied to an iron post and a strict guard placed over him until the company was transferred.

At Madisonville, Jan. 30-Feb. 25, 1864

Relates that Confederate guerrillas attempted to capture an infantry squad; arrival of African American troops at Madisonville (Feb. 2); a skirmish resulting in the loss of 7 men; and a smallpox outbreak in the camp. He also mentions the election of Michael Hahn (spelled Hann) as governor of Louisiana.

At Algiers, Feb. 27-Mar. 21, 1864

Notes review of his division by General John Alexander McClernand (Mar. 3); orders of Ohio regiments to march on to Brashear City; and organization of “Werner’s Battalion.” He also writes about his baptism in the Baptist Church (Mar. 20).

At Port Hudson, March 25-26, 1864

Tells of his passage to Port Hudson and comments on the pleasure of working with African American troops.

Reached Alexandria and Piney Woods, March 28-30, 1864

Relates that Federal prisoners captured at Morganza the previous winter had escaped from their imprisonment at Shreveport and rejoined troops at Piney Woods. He discusses the landscape of the area and the building of a bridge to cross the Cane River.

At Natchitoches, April 2-4, 1864

Discusses his commission to take a squad of men to guard recruits and describes his impressions of the streets and architecture of the “old Spanish town” of Natchitoches.

Pleasant Hill, April 6-9, 1864

Relates march from Grand Ecore to Pleasant Hill accompanied by “about 250 joyous freed people of all ages and shades of color from pure African black to caucasian white.” Tyson also describes the Battle of Sabine Crossroads.

At Grand Ecore, April 11-21, 1864

Discusses preparations and orders concerning fortifications; reports news that the 47th Indiana had been ordered to Illinois “to kill Copperheads collected near there.”

Camp at Alexandria, April 24-May 11, 1864

Relates an attack by Confederate troops near the Red River (April 24). Also discusses his assignment to gather up contrabands and place them where they are needed; notes that he “gathered up about 1000 of all ages and colors and of both sexes, sick, maimed, scarred, bandy-legged, and bowlegged, with bundles of all sizes and colors” (April 27), as well as “collected about 200 Negroes -- found a party of about 30 two miles above town on the river bank, sent those who were able to walk to town, but sent those who were too sick to walk to place of safety via ambulance; all sick colored people placed in hospital” (April 28). Tyson also discusses his commission and work to build a dam at the Red River as a fortification against Confederate troops.

On the march south from Alexandria (May 13-17, 1864)

Relates infantry marching along the levee; a group of recently joined refugees who destroyed warehouses in Alexandria; and fire consuming all of Alexandria north of the railroad. He explains that his brigade was blamed for setting the fires and that “eleven of our men were arrested and tied together and marched along thus to be punished for pillaging.” He writes of movements and fortifications of troops, witnesses a battle on Avoyelles Prairie (May 16), and notes a scarcity of water.

At Morganza, La., May 23-June 20, 1864

Mentions that Corps d’Afrique was set to build forts along the Atchafalaya River (June 2-3). Reports that Major Samuel McLean Pollock was captured and paroled, but that “all the colored men who wore the U.S. uniform who were captured were shot in cold blood by the enemy and that those who were captured from us without the uniform on were sold back into slavery” (June 5).

At Port Hudson, June 21-Aug. 1, 1864

Discusses landscape of Port Hudson and attends an African American church service.

Morganza, Aug. 2-Dec. 31, 1864

Discusses consolidation of African American troops within the army; relates news of Sherman’s victory in Atlanta (Aug. 14); and discusses Longfellow’s *Evangeline* (Sept. 3). He writes of an incident on a scout march along the Atchafalaya in which the men came across a plantation home and “went plundering the premises, inside and out and the family disgracefully used” (Sept. 21), and mentions that “a fine house belonging a citizen soldier of the Confederacy on the opposite side of the river was burned this evening” (Sept. 22). Tyson also notes a yellow fever epidemic in New Orleans and that the afflicted portion of the city was surrounded “by a trail of tar and strong guard who allowed no ingress or egress” (Oct. 24), and mentions spending off-duty time teaching and reading to African American troops and writing letters to their friends and relatives. He also discusses the presidential election and sentiments among the camp (Oct. 30-Nov. 19).

INDEX TERMS

Diaries.

Freedmen--Louisiana.

Louisiana--History--Civil War, 1861-1865.

Red River Expedition, 1864.

Tyson, Robert A.

United States. Army. Indiana Infantry Regiment, 46th (1861-1865)

United States. Army--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--African American troops.

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Campaigns.

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Destruction and pillage.

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Personal narratives.

CONTAINER LIST

<u>Stack</u>	
<u>Location</u>	<u>Contents</u>
M:18	Robert A. Tyson Diary (1863-1864);
Mss.MF:T	1 reel of microfilm: Robert A. Tyson Diary (1863-1864).