

A History of the 243rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Regiment (The Buxmont Guard)

Recent excavations to expand the old Union Library in Hatboro, Pennsylvania, unearthed rapidly deteriorating documents which enabled a local historian to quickly compile the history of a forgotten Civil War military unit, the 243rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Regiment (Buxmont Guard). Since no record of this unit exists within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or in the Army War College's archives in Carlisle, PA, by feverishly working with this handful of material an account was preserved which otherwise would have been lost to the ages. What follows is the story that emerged just as these timeworn manuscripts turned to a powder and were scattered by the winds.

The 243rd Pennsylvania was an undocumented Volunteer Infantry Regiment, mustered into service early in 1863, and headquartered in the old Union Library building at 243 S. York Road in Hatboro, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania (hence the regimental designation.) The unit was raised by a single individual, Mr. Philadelphia Buxmont, who was born on October 18, 1806, and was described by others as a "Gentlemen, Sportsman, Philanderer," with the latter perhaps a misspelling of the word philanthropist. Regardless, as an impressionable youth, young "Philly" Buxmont was sent from his Pennsylvania home to live for a time with spinster aunts in West Point, Mississippi, where he graduated from that school system in the top ten percent of the bottom eighth of his class. Following graduation, he apparently made his fortune in ladies' apparel, of which he purchased large quantities. In addition, several ledger items indicate that Buxmont regularly sent funds to prominent merchants R. H. Macy in New York and J. C. Strawbridge in the Germantown section of Philadelphia, apparently in support of an organization he noted as "ladies' foundations," which may be further evidence of his philanthropic fancies.

Anyway, from what could be gleaned from such fragile documents, Buxmont, who considered himself a "West Point Man," became disheartened by the performance of the Union Officer Corps during engagements in 1861-1862. So, to gain knowledge and insight into this situation, Buxmont apparently disguised as a *vivandiere*, infiltrated several army units and moved freely among the enlisted ranks. Although never witnessing actual combat, Buxmont did overhear several heated arguments during his fact-finding mission. Then, apparently taking to heart and expanding upon a suggestion made in 1861 by political satirist "Artemus Ward" – who proposed organizing a company comprised entirely of brigadier generals – upon his return to the area Buxmont petitioned Pennsylvania Governor Andrew Gregg Curtin to sanction an all-officer regiment. Unfortunately, since civil war regiments elected their officers or state governors appointed them, Buxmont's petition fell upon deaf ears. Determined to proceed, Buxmont offered to fund the regiment entirely at his own expense and, after making well-placed political contributions, he was eventually directed to a moderately sympathetic minor state official who give him tacit approval.

Unfortunately, at this point in time the historical record is lacking. Apparently, Buxmont fell upon hard times, his funds had dwindled, and a full cadre of officers had already been assigned to established units. Undaunted, and with draft fever rising, Buxmont hit upon the idea of selling commissions in his new regiment on a sliding scale. (I.e., a captain's commission cost more than a lieutenant's, etc.) Clearly, Buxmont surmised that a young lad, concerned about being drafted, could present his commission from the 243rd PVI to his local draft board and enter active military service as an accomplished officer of equal or greater rank. Conversely, such a commission could be utilized to demonstrate a commitment to serve, thereby gaining valuable time to await a change in the prevailing political climate. Additionally, Buxmont, a gentleman of vision and an early supporter of woman's suffrage, insisted upon offering commissions regardless of age, race, sex, national origin, or political "sympathy," with the latter probably resulting from the time he spent in Mississippi. Regardless of his intentions, the idea was a smashing success and by March 1863 the unit was staffed to overflowing.



It is also clear that Buxmont again prevailed upon the generosity of the Commonwealth, for the 243rd PVI, or “Buxmont Guard” as the unit was now known, was issued regulation uniforms. However, due to the demand for leather goods by troops already in the field, some standard issue items were omitted because they were in very short supply. To solve this vexing problem, Buxmont was forced to seek assistance from business associates and, according to the historical record; he had invested heavily in the nauga future’s market with the nefarious New York City firm of Dewey, Cheatem, and Howe. (Note: Early in the war speculators began to finance secret ranches in far northern Canada where naugas were being raised in the hope that the hides they shed would be a commercially viable leather substitute.)

Buxmont was clearly successful, because in April 1863 it was reported: “As the unit gathered for its first parade on a field located a short distance south of their Hatboro headquarters, the throng of citizens in attendance stood awestruck at the sight of the regiment dressed in rich, federal blue officer’s uniforms. Their gleaming swords, polished buttons, and brightly shined naugahyde belts and boots were resplendent as the on looking sun. Then, as the bugler sounded “The Assembly” followed by “To the Standard” an honor guard unfurled brilliant new Union and Regimental flags that snapped smartly in the breeze as the Regimental Band began to play rousing martial airs.”

Unfortunately, with everyone in the regiment holding a commission, and no noncommissioned personnel to command, confusion ensued and the parade formation quickly collapsed. Additionally, as junior officers realized there were few, if any, officers below them to order about, they hastened to remedy the situation by purchasing field grade commissions. To add to the disorder, when subordinate officers did not like an order or command they received, they would immediately upgrade their commissions and, in essence, countermand the offensive order straightaway.

Well, once everything was finally resolved the sun had set and the regiment left the parade ground and retired to the adjacent Old Mill Inn for refreshments. Throughout the remaining spring, the regiment regularly attempted to drill, but invariably they quickly adjourned to the Old Mill Inn because the weather was either too cool, too warm, or to address never-ending organizational complications.

Then, in late June 1863, the alarm sounded as Confederate forces under General Robert E. Lee marched toward Pennsylvania soil. With an invasion imminent, President Abraham Lincoln, through Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, ordered Regular Army and Volunteer Artillery, Cavalry, and Infantry units to assemble. Likewise, Governor Andrew Curtin called for Militia and Home Guard units from the surrounding countryside to report for duty. However, confusion again reigned supreme at the 243rd Regiment’s Headquarters, but not from what you would expect from this all-officer regiment, but from a desire on the part of each member to step forward and upgrade their commissions so as to play a more prominent role in the coming conflict. Unfortunately, by the time a chain of command was firmly established and the ranks were mustered by grade, the crisis passed and the 243rd, as had become its custom, once again retired to the Old Mill Inn to contemplate its next move.

On 4 July 1863, following their Gettysburg defeat, General Lee began moving his battered Army of Northern Virginia back toward Maryland, but members of the 243rd were disturbed because they had accomplished so little. To ease this feeling, they held a belated Independence Day picnic on the parade grounds, toasted fallen comrades, listened to rousing speeches extolling their loyalty and readiness to serve, and generally had a grand time. Sadly, this did not relieve the lingering guilt they felt from the loss of so many brave brother officers in the preceding battle. To compound their distress, they learned that Buxmont had lost everything when the nauga market crashed following the introduction of faux (imitation) naugahyde the previous May. Worse yet, telegrams revealed that Buxmont, while racing to confront his partners, died in a fall at Niagara while attempting to overtake the scoundrels as they crossed the Canadian border to escape to their secret ranches in the remote north woods. Demoralized and with their fighting spirit broken the 243rd valiantly, though reluctantly, forged ahead.



Unfortunately, nothing else is known about this regiment, its members, or when it was mustered out of service. However, reports are that sometime after the war, when Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant and native Pennsylvanians Major Generals George Gordon Meade and Winfield Scott Hancock were asked to comment on the contributions officers of the 243rd PVI made to the war effort, they looked at one another and responded in unison, “Who?!” All of that aside, it can be said with a small degree of certainty that some members of the 243rd went on to serve with little or no distinction on both sides of the late conflict.

Moving ahead to the 1890's when most monuments commemorating the fighting at Gettysburg were being dedicated, those who survived the “Old 243rd” may have been among those who gathered to pledge their support to the eternal preservation of that most hallowed ground. They, however, were again forgotten and all too soon the final heart-searching bugle-call “Lights Out” sounded and the last of these gallant warriors were summoned home to join their fallen comrades under the stars.

Now, the Union Library Civil War Round Table, in keeping with true Civil War era tradition, will honor the memory and the pledge conceivably made by these humble, and possibly heroic veterans, by once again offering to commission Officers in the America Civil War unit of their choice. Once commissioned, individuals will be assigned to one of the units which currently comprise the 26th Corps, Federal Army of the United States (Reserved). At this time these include, the 243rd Pennsylvania Infantry (The Buxmont Guard), the 244th Pennsylvania Infantry (The 9th California Infantry), the 17th New Jersey Infantry, the 23rd Pennsylvania Cavalry (245th Pennsylvania Volunteers), the 2nd New York Light Artillery, and the 76th Virginia Infantry (The Fairfax Legion) with all net proceeds being divided in support of the Round Table’s scholarship fund and other historic preservation activities.

To secure a lifetime Commission for yourself, a family member, loved one or friend, or as a lasting memory for a fallen comrade, while helping to preserve our endangered National heritage, simply complete the attached enlistment papers and, if you choose, designate a Civil War preservation charity to receive a donation. Then, through the American Civil War Charitable Trust TM, a share of the net proceeds realized from your commission (or promotion) will be donated in your name to the Civil War preservation charity of your choice.

The following Commissions are available:

Lieut. General	\$250	Colonel	\$100	Captain	\$20
Major General	\$200	Lt. Colonel	\$ 75	1 st Lieut.	\$10
Brig. General	\$150	Major	\$ 50	2 nd Lieut.	\$ 5

Promotions are authorized for the difference between the rank presently held and the rank desired.
(E.g., to be promoted to Colonel from Major: \$100-\$50 = \$50)

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