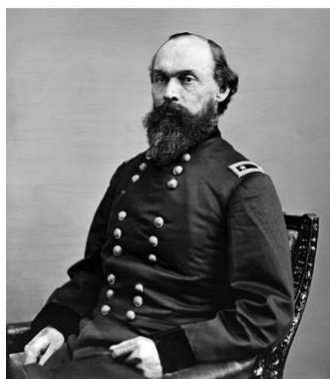


Private Martin Mitchell of the 108th Illinois Infantry Regiment
In the American Civil War

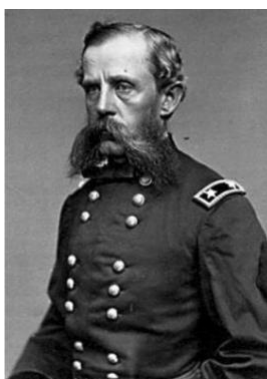
From time to time, as a young boy growing up near Peoria, Illinois, a visit to Grandma's house would be a treat. Grandma had been born in her house, and her attic had accumulated many interesting items for her curious grandson. On one such occasion, I found a large family Bible, very dusty and decrepit, but inside the front cover were four very old letters in a relatively modern envelope. The letters were from my Grandmother's great-grandfather, Private Martin Mitchell (1819-1863), who had volunteered to serve with the 108th Illinois Infantry in the Civil War (<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Mitchell-21517>).

Martin Mitchell was a Cornish tin miner from the small mining town of Illogan, Cornwall, England, who migrated to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. Illogan miners extracted tin from solid rock and mixed it with copper to get bronze, from which weapons were made (<https://bernarddeacon.com/mining/cornish-mining-a-short-history/>). The entire world was drawn to the Cornish coast to obtain tin. The PBS Series *Poldark* was set in this time and place and did an excellent job of representing life as a tin miner. But by 1866, the tin mines were depleted, and the miners were forced into other industries or sought out work in other mines around the world. Once Martin arrived in the United States, he settled in Pennsylvania to mine coal. It is not clear why Martin left the coal mines in Pennsylvania, but by 1861, he and his wife, Elizabeth Patton (1818-1910), lived near Peoria, Illinois (<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Patton-4747>).

Forty-three-year-old Martin Mitchell answered fellow Illinoisian President Abraham Lincoln's call for soldiers to preserve the Union. On August 28, 1862, he joined Company G of the 108th Illinois, which was being formed by Colonel John Warner. The regiment left Peoria six weeks later, bound for Covington, Kentucky (*Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois. Vol. VI, 71-74*). On arrival, the 108th was assigned to Major General Gordon Granger (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_Granger), commander of the Army of Kentucky, Brigadier General Absalom Baird (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absalom_Baird), commander 3rd Division, and Colonel John Coburn ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Coburn_\(Indiana_politician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Coburn_(Indiana_politician))), commander of the First Brigade.



MG Gordon Granger
(1821-1876)



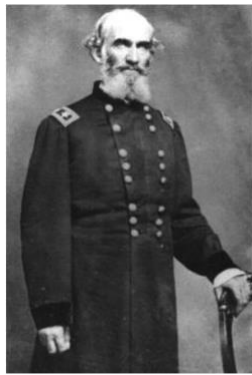
BG Absalom Baird
(1824-1905)



Col. John Coburn
(1825-1908)

These three general officers each had distinguished army careers. Granger would be remembered for his part at the Battles of Chickamauga and Chattanooga and for enforcing the Emancipation Proclamation in Galveston, Texas, in 1865. Baird would be awarded the Medal of Honor for leading a detached unit in a charge during the Battle of Jonesborough (1864). Coburn would lead the first troops into Atlanta and receive the surrender of the mayor.

On the 14th of October, Baird's Division, along with the 108th, left Covington and made its way to Nicholasville, where it went into camp on November 1st. Three of Martin's letters were written during this time of campaigning in Kentucky. In them, he describes the detritus left behind by Bragg's Army, which had just invaded Kentucky and fought the Battle of Perryville. While at Nicholasville, the army is again reorganized, this time to be readied for inclusion in Sherman's expeditionary force being assembled downriver in Memphis, TN. The 108th marched to Louisville under Brigadier General A. J. Smith (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Jackson_Smith), commander of the First Division, and Col William Landrum (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_J._Landrum), commander of the Second Brigade.

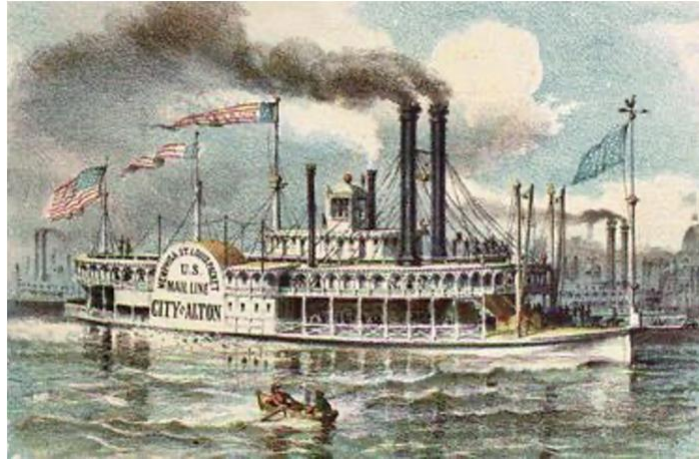


Brig. Gen. A. J. Smith
(1815-1897)



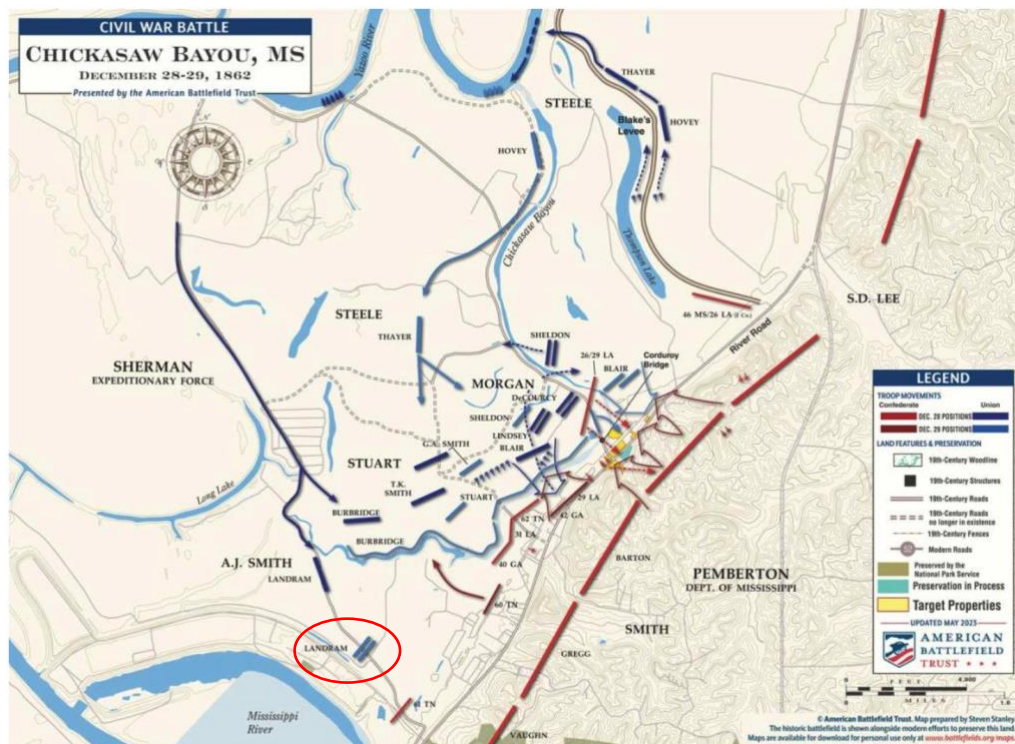
Col. William J. Landrum
(1828-1895)

Once at Louisville, the entire division boarded transports and set off downriver to Memphis, where they arrived on November 26th to become part of Sherman's Expeditionary force. The fourth of Martin's letters would be written after his stay in Memphis and would express his fondness for the city. After a month of picket duty in Memphis, the Expeditionary force again boarded transports and set off downriver to capture Vicksburg. The 108th was ordered to be aboard the "City of Alton" as she went down the Mississippi River to her destination at Young's Point, Louisiana (*Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois. Vol. VI, 71-74*). The fourth of Martin Mitchell's letters was written just prior to their reboarding of the transports, describing how much the troops liked Memphis.



The “City of Alton” as She Appeared in 1864.

On the morning of December 29th, the 108th again boarded the “City of Alton” to prepare for the Battle of Chickasaw Bayou. The regiment would hold the extreme right flank of the Union position and see mainly three days of skirmishing in very dense underbrush in front of Confederate-placed abatis. In the middle of the night, the Union forces would quietly reboard the transports and head back to Milliken’s Bend (Bentley, *History of the 77th Illinois Infantry*, 109).



The Battle of Chickasaw Bayou, December 28-29, 1862,
American Battlefield Trust

Major General John A. McClernand (<https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/McClernand-2>) took command of the Union forces and attacked upriver at Fort Hindman, known as the Battle of

Arkansas Post, on January 9-11, 1863 (<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/battle-arkansas-post>).



Major General John A. McClernand (1812-1900)
American Battlefield Trust

In late winter and early Spring, the 108th Illinois, with Martin Mitchell in the ranks, became involved in Grant's attempts near the Mississippi and Yazoo Rivers to circumvent Vicksburg. Somewhere between exposure to the cold, wet weather and the filth of the river transports, Martin fell ill and was taken to a hospital ship. He would not live to see the summer. He would die aboard the Van Buren Hospital ship at Young's Point, Louisiana, on April 14, 1863. His body was most likely buried in a levee because of the wet spring ahead. The only dry places for burials were the levees. The Mississippi River overflowed its banks, and his remains were probably washed away with the rising water. Martin Mitchell's body is still missing, but his service in the 108th Illinois and his patriotic sacrifice will always be remembered!

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