

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Bryan Morel Thomas  
Possible Member of Rocky Mountain Lodge No. 205 A.F.&A.M.  
by George F. Winters, Historian

Bryan M. Thomas was born on May 8, 1836, in Milledgeville, Georgia to parents John S. (Sherrod or Sherard) Thomas (1792-1881) and Mary Bryan Elza Neyle/Thomas (1796-1836). Thomas has several siblings, Mary Neyle Thomas (1831-1917), John Greenbury Thomas (1833-1906), Eliza Neyle Thomas/Wright (1834-1870), and half-brother, Henry Percival Thomas(1838–1892).<sup>1</sup>

He gained his primary education while attending Atlanta's Oglethorpe University. On July 1, 1854, he entered the United States Military Academy at West Point. Thomas graduated four years later and stood 22nd out of 54 cadets<sup>2</sup>. On July 1, 1858, he was brevetted as a second lieutenant and assigned to the 8th U.S. Infantry<sup>3</sup>.

In 1859, Thomas was stationed at Camp Floyd in Utah Territory. He corresponded with Grand Secretary Christopher Diehl prior to 1900 providing details of the first Lodge building in the state. As Goodwin mentions, Lieutenant Thomas was raised in Rocky Mountain Lodge No.205 sometime during the first year of the Lodge.<sup>4</sup>

Following Georgia's secession, Thomas resigned his commission in the U.S. Army effective April 6, 1861.[3] He was commissioned as a first lieutenant in the regular Confederate infantry on March 16 and promoted to major in the regular service that same day. In July Thomas was assigned to the 18th Alabama Infantry with the rank of major. Leaving the line service for staff work, Thomas was assigned to command the ordnance in the Confederate Department of Alabama & West Florida on December 20.<sup>5</sup>

In 1862 Thomas was sent to serve in the Western Theater and was given command of the artillery belonging to a brigade in the Army of Mississippi as of March 18. Eight days later Thomas was appointed assistant inspector general of the brigade, a post he held until that summer.<sup>6</sup> Assigned to the staff of Maj. Gen. Jones M. Withers, Thomas fought at the Battle of Shiloh on April 6–7, performing a "commendable part in the battle..."<sup>7</sup> In July he was assigned command of the army's Reserve Corps artillery, a position Thomas would hold for the rest of the year. He also participated in the Kentucky Campaign that autumn, and then took a brief sick leave. Thomas returned to duty in time to fight during the Battle of Stone's River in late 1862.



Beginning on January 2, 1863, Thomas was assigned as assistant inspector general of the Withers' Division in the renamed Army of Tennessee.[6] Later in 1863, on the recommendation of Lt. Gen. Leonidas Polk, he was promoted to colonel and given command of the 12th Mississippi Cavalry. This new regiment, the reserve cavalry of Brig. Gen. James H. Clanton's Alabama Brigade, was also variously known as "Col. Thomas's Alabama Cavalry."<sup>8</sup>

On 14 Nov 1864 in Mobile, Alabama, Brigadier General (CSA) Bryan M. Thomas and Mary Jones Withers were married<sup>9</sup> They would have 5 children together, Eloise Withers Thomas (1865-1898), Harriet Hugee Thomas (1867-?),

Thomas J Thomas (1869-?), John Sherrod Thomas (1869-?), and Sylla W. Thomas (1875-1946).

On August 4, 1864, he was appointed as a "temporary" brigadier general of volunteer troops and that September was assigned brigade command in the defenses in Mobile, Alabama. His appointment was never confirmed by the Confederate Congress, so his actual highest grade was colonel.<sup>10</sup>

In 1865 Thomas participated in the Mobile Campaign as part of the Confederate force holding Fort Blakely in Baldwin County, Alabama. Beginning on April 1 Thomas and the fort was put under siege by the Union forces of Maj. Gen. Edward R. S. Canby. His command—mostly consisting of "boy reserves"—held the right of the Confederate works, on the left was the division of Brig. Gen. Francis Cockrell, and both under Brig. Gen. St. John Richardson Liddell, the garrison commander. At 5:30 p.m. on April 9 the attack came, with simple numbers (around 16,000 Union versus 4,475 Confederate) deciding the assault, which lasted only 20 minutes. In the fight, 3,700 Confederates, Thomas, Cockrell, as well as Liddell were all captured.<sup>11</sup> Thomas was held until June when he was released from Fort Gaines, Alabama, paroled and returned home.<sup>12</sup>

After the war, he was a farmer in Georgia and a US Marshal. As noted in "*Freemasonry in Utah, Rocky Mountain Lodge No. 205 A.F.&A.M.*" by Sam H. Goodwin, Thomas did have correspondence with our late Grand Secretary, Brother Christopher Diehl, under date of August 29, 1897, and again September 29, 1897. In those letters, Thomas provided intimate details and a drawing of the Lodge's building.

Thomas died on 16 July 1905, and is buried at the West Hill Cemetery, Dalton, Whitfield County, Georgia alongside his wife Mary who died on 23 July 1918<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Ancestry.com <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/7334405/person/372096187641/facts> visited 6/15/2021

<sup>2</sup> <https://civilwarintheeast.com/west-point-officers-in-the-civil-war/class-of-1858/> visited 6/10/2021

<sup>3</sup> Eicher, Civil War High Commands, p. 612

<sup>4</sup> Freemasonry In Utah Rocky Mountain Lodge No. 205 A.F.&A.M. by S.H. Goodwin, October 1934, p. 39

<sup>5</sup> Eicher, John H., and David J. Eicher, Civil War High Commands. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001. ISBN 978-0-8047-3641-1. p. 612

<sup>6</sup> Eicher, Civil War High Commands, p. 612. Led artillery then was made ass. inspector gen. of the 3rd Brigade, 2nd Division (Withers') in the 2nd corps, Army of Mississippi. p.612

<sup>7</sup> Warner, Ezra J. Generals in Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959. ISBN 978-0-8071-0823-9. p. 304

<sup>8</sup> Warner, Ezra J. Generals in Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959. ISBN 978-0-8071-0823-9. P.305

<sup>9</sup> Alabama, U.S., County Marriage Records, 1805-1967 for Mary J Withers, Ancestry.com <https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/61365/images/TH-1-16504-75989-28?pld=900352426> visited 6/10/2021

<sup>10</sup> Wright, Marcus J., General Officers of the Confederate Army: Officers of the Executive Departments of the Confederate States, Members of the Confederate Congress by States. Mattituck, NY: J. M. Carroll & Co., 1983. ISBN 0-8488-0009-5. First published 1911 by Neale Publishing Co. p. 130

<sup>11</sup> Eicher, David J. The Longest Night: A Military History of the Civil War. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001. ISBN 978-0-684-84944-7.p.838-39

<sup>12</sup> Eicher, John H., and David J. Eicher, Civil War High Commands. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001. ISBN 978-0-8047-3641-1. P.613

<sup>13</sup> Find A Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/11092/bryan-morel-thomas> visited 6/12/2021