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Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States

COMMANDERY OF THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

In Memoriam

JAMES WILLIAM THOMSON

Chief-Engineer (Rear Admiral) U. S. Navy

DIED AT MOORESTOWN N. J. MARCH 17 1914

Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States

HEADQUARTERS COMMANDERY OF THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

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Philadelphia, August 15, 1914.

JAMES WILLIAM THOMSON.

Third Assistant Engineer U. S. Navy June 26, 1856; First Assistant Engineer (Ensign) August 2, 1859; Chief Engineer (Lieut.-Commander) February 2, 1862; Chief Engineer (Commander) August 18, 1883; Chief Engineer (Captain) March 1, 1892; retired (Captain) June 26, 1896; Chief Engineer (Rear-Admiral) retired June 29, 1906.

Elected February 6, 1889. Class 1. Insignia 6775.

Born November 10, 1836, at Wilmington, Del.

Died March 17, 1914, at Moorestown, N. J.

Companion James William Thomson lived almost to the four score years which marks the limit of the great majority of long-lived men. His death came some eighteen years after his voluntary retirement from active duty under the 40 year service law, and was preceded by a few years of gradual development of the disease which terminated his life.

His parents, Dr. James William Thomson and Sarah Peters Robinson Thomson, gave him his education first at private schools and finally at the Delaware Military Academy, whence he graduated in 1853. Having a decided bent for mechanics, and an adventurous spirit, he determined to enter the naval service as an engineer, and in order to prepare himself for the examinations he devoted the three following years to the study of engineering at the ship-building works of Harlan & Hollingsworth, Wilmington; this being, at the time, one of the largest plants of the kind in the country. With the experience thus gained he readily secured an appointment from New Jersey as a Third Assistant Engineer in the U. S. Navy, and was assigned to his first duty on the Frigate Wabash (1857-60) on the home and European Stations. Before the completion of his cruise on this vessel he was, through his own merits, promoted directly from Third Assistant to First Assistant Engineer.

He was then transferred to the Sloop of War Dacotah, on the Asiatic Station, but on the breaking out of the War of the Rebellion he was assigned to duty on the Sloop of War Shenandoah, of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, and on this vessel and the Gunboat Galena, he served until the war was ended; participating, on the former, in the battles at Charleston, Wilmington, Beaufort and Roanoke Island, and on the Galena in the engagements at Sewall's Point, Fort Darling, Drewry's Bluff and Malvern Hill, General McClellan directing the latter battle from the decks of the Galena.

He was promoted to the grade of Chief Engineer at almost the beginning of the war, being at that time scarcely more than twenty-five years of age and

the youngest Chief Engineer appointed in the Corps. His service was marked by the qualities of indefatigable energy, instantaneous resourcefulness and a fearless bravery, unmixed with foolhardiness, which rendered him a potent factor in the successful operations of the vessels to which he was attached. These qualities may be said to have been the chief characteristics of his "personality" throughout his entire career. Commodore John Rodgers, U. S. N., Commanding Officer of the Galena, in a report to Flag Officer L. M. Goldsborough, May 15, 1862, stated that "at the Battle of Drewry's Bluff, James W. Thomson, First Assistant Engineer, coolly repaired, under fire, some of the deck valve gear that had broken down, and also, under his directions, a fire which had broken out in the steerage, from an exploding shell, was extinguished before the regular firemen reached the place." Later, Captain B. F. Sands in a report to Rear-Admiral S. P. Lee, October 6, 1863, stated: "Through the untiring zeal and energy of Chief Engineer Thomson of the Shenandoah, and the facilities afforded by Captain Rodgers of that vessel, I have been enabled to render both the Victoria and the Calypso efficient for service."

Chief Engineer Thomson had special duty and was a member of the Examining Board for Promotion of Engineer Officers 1865-69. He served on the U. S. S. Congress, North Atlantic Squadron, 1870-1. He was Chief Engineer of the Philadelphia Navy Yard 1871-2, and was then ordered to the U. S. S. Richmond, 1872-3, and U. S. S. Omaha, Pacific Squadron, 1873-4. From 1875-7 he was made a member of the Board of Inspection and Survey and was sent as Fleet Engineer of the Pacific Squadron where he served on the Flagship Alaska 1877-81. In 1881 he became again a member of the Examining Board and from this duty he was ordered as Inspector and Chief Engineer in completing the Atlanta, Boston, Chicago and Dolphin, at Roach's Shipyard 1885-88. His last active sea duty was as Fleet Engineer of the North Atlantic Squadron 1888-9 on the Flagship Pensacola, during the period in which that vessel was engaged in carrying out an Astronomical Expedition to view the total eclipse of the sun at St. Paul de Loando, Africa. From 1890 to 1896 he was Inspector of Machinery at the William Cramp & Sons' Shipyard, Philadelphia, during the construction of the Indiana, Massachusetts, Minneapolis and Columbia, where his qualities as a keen critic of work and design, and as a forceful inspector were tested to the full and found to be unsurpassed. His work here was ever tempered with a broad common-sense appreciation of the contractor's view point and the results of his inspection never embittered the contractors nor detracted from the excellence of the output. The Bureau of Steam Engineering selected Chief Engineer Thomson as the best man to send to the Newport News Shipbuilding Co., when (1896) they began work on their first Government contract and needed a helpful inspector more than a merely rigid enforcer of the specifications; but after a few months of this duty he found that his health was not equal to the task, and that the effects of overwork and nervous anxiety had to be realized as a demand for rest. He voluntarily retired in June, 1896, on the completion of forty years of arduous service.

His resting days were, however, of short duration; on the breaking out of the Spanish War, 1898, his services were again requisitioned by the Department for the most important work of carrying on repairs to vessels sent to Key West from the fleet. He was on the staff of Admiral Remy (Flagship

Lancaster) at Key West until the end of the war, when he returned home to settle at Moorestown, N. J.

By special act of Congress, approved May 13, 1908, he was presented with a Civil War Service Medal, and in 1908 he received a West Indies Campaign Spanish War Medal.

He was a member of Washington Lodge A. Y. M., Phila. He was a staunch friend and a devoted husband and father. His remains were buried in Woodlands Cemetery, Philadelphia, Pa., March 20, 1914.

J. A. B. SMITH,
Rear-Admiral U. S. Navy.
S. L. P. AYRES,
Chief Engineer (Rear-Admiral) U. S. Navy.
JAMES H. PERRY,
Captain U. S. Navy.
ROBT. CRAWFORD,
Chief Engineer (Lt.-Commander) U. S. Navy.
JOHN D. WILLIAMSON,
Acting Chief Engineer (Lt.-Commander) U. S. Navy.
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By command of

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