

The Discharge of Perry Harris

Your son is 14 years old.

Seems like he lied about his age, joined the military and is now serving in Afghanistan.

All a big surprise to you.

Can you imagine how you would feel being a parent and getting news like this? If so, you have just a small idea of how Thomas Harris felt.

His 14 year old disabled son did exactly that, but instead of serving in Afghanistan, he was attached to the 55th infantry in Kentucky.

Obviously his father's first thought was to get him discharged and sent home as quickly as possible. But there was a war on and the final order to release him could have taken weeks, maybe even months to initiate.

This situation needed immediate attention.

Thomas Harris quickly sent out a plea for his son to not only his senator, Senator Lyman Trumbull of Illinois, but to the general in charge as well, General John Palmer.

"My son Perry Harris, 14 years old insane crippled has been mustered into the 55th Kentucky regiment," he wrote. "Please have Secretary of War order him discharged."

When General Palmer received the letter, I'm sure his fatherly instincts kicked in because he didn't deliver it to the Secretary of War for processing as he should have, but instead forwarded it right to the President of the United States himself.

When the president received it, there was no hesitation on his part. He turned the note over and began to write.

Maybe the sense of urgency was because that he had 3 children of his own who passed away at a young age and he knew what this father was going through.

Or, maybe there was something to be said about his reputation for compassion;

especially when it came to children in the military; something that was not uncommon at the time.

"Let this boy be discharged,"

were the president's simple words followed by his signature. Nothing more needed to be said.

So Perry Harris, age 14, was discharged and sent home on April 15, 1865.

This date is a historic one for the nation. Not because of the compassion a president showed for a father and his son, but because of the death of that very same president.

On the same day Perry Harris returned home to his family, a cruel twist of fate took the life of the the president who signed his discharge.

For on April 15, 1865 President Abraham Lincoln would be cut down by an assassins bullet at Fords Theater.