

FEBRUARY 23 - MARCH 1, 1862

On March 1, 1862, the 12th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers marched into Charles Town, by the spot where John Brown was hanged, "with colors flying, and the band playing its very best music." One account said the regiment sang "John Brown's Body."

The 12th Massachusetts was known as the "Hallelujah Regiment." Early in the war, the regiment had adopted "John Brown's Body" as a joke involving fellow member John Brown, a Scotsman with the same name as the abolitionist.

The 12th sang "John Brown's Body" in Boston and New York in July 1861 on its way to the front, and the song quickly became one of the most popular of the Civil War, the connection to Scotsman John Brown being replaced by one to the abolitionist.

The 12th was not the first Union group to perform the song in Charles Town, but it was perhaps the most noteworthy. John Brown, the Scotsman from the Massachusetts militia, was a sergeant in Company A, 12th Massachusetts. Three months later, Sgt. John Brown drowned in the Shenandoah River, a little more than 30 miles from where the more famous John Brown was hanged in 1859.

This sesquicentennial moment is brought to you by the West Virginia Sesquicentennial Commission and the West Virginia Division of Culture and History, Archives and History Section.

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