

## ERIE COUNTY'S CIVIL WAR HEROES

# Several Union soldiers served after the war

BY JAKE KOCH



*Gen. Philip Sheridan*

Wars never end easily.

The fighting never stops in a manner that lets the soldiers simply lay down their weapons and return home.

This is true throughout history, whether you are talking about current events, World War II or the Peloponnesian Wars of Ancient Greece.

The American Civil War was no different. While many believe the whole story ends with Robert E. Lee's surrender to Ulysses S. Grant followed by the assassination of President Lincoln in April of 1865, nothing could be further from the truth.

I could go into the politics of Reconstruction, the abandonment of that process that led to the Jim Crow South and the eventual Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

All those connected issues served as a continuation of that terrible war that started in 1861. Others in this series have touched on Reconstruction; however, I instead will discuss the volunteer soldiers from Erie County still in uniform after the shooting technically stopped.

Of the nearly dozen regiments that had at least a company recruited from Erie County to fight in the Civil War, eight were still in uniform and serving two months after Lee's surrender in June of 1865. The majority of those regiments would muster out and return home at some point in June and July, with a few staying later.

The 3rd Ohio Cavalry stayed in the Army into August on occupation duty in Macon, Ga., the 72nd Ohio Infantry into September on occupation duty in Vicksburg, Miss., and a third unit even past Thanksgiving 150 years ago.

I am going to focus on that last Erie County unit to muster out, the 65th Ohio Infantry. That regiment has been mentioned in previous articles, with Company G being composed of Erie County men. The regiment had fought with distinction since early 1862, fighting at Shiloh, Corinth, Stones River, Tullahoma, Chickamauga, Missionary Ridge, Rocky Face Ridge, Dalton, New Hope Church, Kennesaw Mountain, Peach Tree Creek, Atlanta, Jonesboro, Spring Hill, Franklin, and Nashville.

The regiment would take part in a little known side note of the Civil War as part of the Army of Observation under General Phil Sheridan, new commander of the Military District of the Southwest. The job of this Army was to keep watch on what was going on south of the Rio Grande. While the United States was busy fighting for its survival, France had ignored the Monroe Doctrine and invaded Mexico.

Napoleon III allowed Archduke Maximilian, the younger brother of Franz Joseph I, Emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, to set himself up as emperor of Mexico with French military support. This had led to a civil war in Mexico with the French backed Maximilian and pro-monarchist Mexicans on one side, and the Democratic government led by Benito Juarez and supported by most of middle and lower class Mexicans on the other.

The United States had refused to recognize Maximilian's government and there was a fear the conflict would spill over into the United States. Napoleon III would withdraw his troops in 1866 and Emperor Maximilian would be executed in 1867.

A total of 50,000 troops would be sent to Texas to monitor the situation on the border. General Sheridan later wrote in his memoirs that he had given weapons and ammunition to Juarez's army, which were simply left at convenient points on the American side of the Rio Grande where Juarez's men would find them.

Sheridan also had his hands full with the now defeated, but still very disgruntled population of Texas. He would eventually be removed from his command by President Johnson because he cracked down on voting rights issues and crimes against formerly enslaved citizens.

In 1866 Sheridan would famously say "If I owned Texas and Hell, I would rent Texas."

The 65th Ohio would spend a very dull and miserable four months as part of the Army of Observation. They were in their camps around Nashville when they learned of their new assignment. According to the regimental historian it was the most unpopular order they ever received. The war was over, and they had expected to be sent home.

Instead they were transported up the Cumberland to Cairo, Illinois. From Cairo they traveled south on the Mississippi, passing many of the places made famous by the war. They even stopped for a few hours and played tourist at Vicksburg, seeing the battlefield they had not fought at, but heard so much about.

They continued downriver to New Orleans. They would go into the camp on the 1815 Chalmette Battlefield for four weeks where for the first time in service they saw alligators and snakes in large numbers.

They left New Orleans on July 17, spending three miserable days aboard a leaky boat, which would actually sink during its next voyage. According to the regimental history only 12 men were spared from seasickness before they landed at Port Lavaca, Texas on June 23.

The next four months would be spent between Lavaca and Victoria. They were kept busy repairing the railroad between those two points, which in turn became their supply line.

They also experienced some new wildlife. They described mosquitoes "in their highest state of carnivorous development," as well as tarantulas, coyotes and horned toads, which many of the men would try to bring home with them.

Their diet improved from the regular army fare with the inclusion of oysters, locally grown pecans, and fresh beef from the wild cattle that a decade later would make many Texans wealthy.

Throughout those four months they simply sat in camp, went on guard duty, and tried to occupy their free time. Heat and humidity gave way to blue northers, extremely cold storms that swept in off of the plains to the north.

Finally, on Nov. 30, 1865, the one-year anniversary of their participation in brutal fighting at the Battle of Franklin where they lost so many comrades, the regiment was mustered out. Only 122 men were left out of the thousand that had joined the regiment in October of 1861.

They braved another treacherous ride to New Orleans before taken a calmer trip up the Mississippi River back to Cairo, where they boarded the trains back to Ohio. They were stopped in Indianapolis for a feast given by the city, and arrived in Columbus on Christmas Day.

After receiving eight months' worth of back pay and wading through the final bits of red tape, their army career was officially over. They boarded the trains to their individual homes, in time for the happiest New Year's celebration they would likely ever know.

The regiment lost 122 men killed and mortally wounded from battle, with another 135 men who died from disease. Scores of others had been discharged previously due to wounds, illness, expiration of term of service, or desertion. These survivors that made it home would attempt to make their transition into civilian life.

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