

Monroe County Civil War Roundtable

The Sentinel

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The 27th Indiana in the Civil War

For the second programming month in succession, our roundtable was honored by a visit from a member of the Indianapolis Civil War Roundtable, Michael Tomey, who has been a teacher in Perry Township in Indianapolis for 29 years, and was named Teacher of the Year in 2004. Mr. Tomey is also a member of the "Sons of the Union Veterans of the Civil War" where he serves as Chaplain and Jr. Vice Commander. His interest in his topic, the 27th Indiana Infantry, arises not only out of the same general passion we all have for the Civil War, but also because he has ancestors who served in this Southern Indiana unit.

The 27th Indiana Infantry regiment was one of the earliest regiments to answer President Lincoln's call for 300,000 men for three year enlistments after the first battle of Bull Run in the summer of 1861. The companies in the regiment were generally formed around the county populations of central and south central Indiana. Most of the counties involved were situated along the route of the Monon Railroad between Indianapolis and Louisville. Much of the recruiting was done by volunteers who rode the Monon trains south, then north, then south again, and on and on, giving "stump" speeches off the backs of trains to an eager crowd of patriotic listeners. Company F, from Monroe County, figured very "huge" in the 27th. Members from this company are the ones who found "Lee's Lost Order #191" outside Frederick, Maryland, in early September, 1863. Corporal Barton Mitchell, the non-commissioned leader of the three, was the one who delivered the find to McClellan. He came back to Indiana after the war and today is buried in the Baptist Church Cemetery in Hartsville, Indiana, between Columbus and Greensburg. This copy of Lee's strategic plans for his army near Sharpsburg, MD, will lead directly to the battle of Antietam. The significance of this discovery, Tomey feels, is much more significant than what it is historically given credit for.

The 27th was also purported to be the "tallest" regiment in the Union Army. Captain Peter Kopp, who organized Company F out of Bloomington, desired to have the entire company composed of men over six feet in height. While not 100% successful, at least half the men did meet that criterion and, in the mid-19th century, this was significant since most men averaged five-feet nine inches or shorter. He enlisted the tallest Yankee of them all in David Van Buskirk, of Gosport, who at 6' 10 1/2 and over 350 pounds, towered over most of his opponents. "Big Dave", as he is fondly remembered, is buried today alongside all three of his wives in a family cemetery in the very northwest corner of Monroe County. This cemetery, after years of neglect, was "renovated" and is maintained today by his great-granddaughter, Patsy Powell, a retired Monroe County grade school music teacher, who lives nearby.

The 27th was also the only Indiana regiment to fight in both the Army of the Potomac (Twelfth Corps) at such places as Gettysburg and Antietam, and then be reassigned to the 20th Corps of the Army of the Cumberland and serve at Resaca, Kennesaw Mountain and other western battle sites. These "tough, and fun loving" boys from the farms and towns of Southern Indiana were truly a joy for Mr. Tomey to study. He found that their resiliency and strong sense

of humor throughout their three year enlistment explains how they were able to have fought in most of the major battles of the east, and then spend most of their final year under seemingly constant fire while they steadily pushed towards Atlanta.

Two members of the Tomey family served in Company G of the 27th Indiana,. Michael Tomey's great-great grandfather, John Michael, and John Michael's brother, Sam. The book *Giants in the Cornfield*, written by Wilbur Jones, is about these two and the rest of this wonderful group of men. The regimental history written in the 1890s by Edmund R. Brown, who served as a corporal for the duration of the 27th's existence, is also a fantastic source of information on the unit.

April Elections are Coming

Elections for the officers (president, secretary, treasurer) of the MCCWR are set to be held in April. A nominating committee will be formed to prepare a slate of candidates for these elections. If you have any interest in serving on the committee, please contact one of the present officers of board members.

No Encampment this Year

The encampment held jointly by the MCCWR and the Monroe County History Center the last two years will take a summer off this season. The major June flooding impacted last year's event greatly, and our re-enactors have other commitments this year in June. The History Center, however, is looking at the possibility of holding a similar lawn event in the early fall, perhaps concentrating not just on the Civil War, but on the cultural, political, and even family history of Monroe County during the middle of the 19th century. If you have ideas on what you would like to see in such an event, or if you would like to participate, contact anyone on the MCCWR or at the History Center.

Check Out Podcasts on Civil War Battlefields

A new form of "battlefield touring" is out there for those who have a computer, and if you have an I-Pod, you can take them with you to the battlefield itself. On Apple's iTunes.com website, most of the music and videos are available to download to your computer...but for a fee. Almost all podcasts, however, are free of charge. You can simply listen to them without downloading, download them to your pc or transfer them to an I-Pod and take them to the battlefield with you. These tours are done by the leading experts in the field and give a raft of information that you could never get on your own. At iTunes.com, simply select "audio podcasts" and type "civil war tours" in the search box.

Last Month's Quiz Answers

1. Name the officer who commanded Grant's naval forces at Forts Henry and Donelson. - **Andrew H. Foote**
2. Name the fort, part of Washington's defenses, that Lincoln personally observed the advance of Early's troops from in July of 1864. He was said to actually be standing in the open under enemy fire, prompting Oliver Wendell Holmes to yell at him, "Get down, you fool!" – **Fort Stevens**
3. Name the Indiana Congressman who was Speaker of the House from '63 to '69 and became Grant's vice-president. – **Schuyler Colfax**
4. What state would you go to today to see the battlefields of Gauley Bridge, Carnifex Ferry and Cheat Mountain? – **West Virginia**

Now try these...

1. How many wives did Captain David "Big Dave" van Buskirk of the 27th Indiana have?
2. Identify the battle of 10/14/1863 where A.P. Hill was caught between the Union II and III corps and which resulted in the death of CSA General Carnot Posey.
3. Name the Union general and former Army of the Potomac commander who, while in charge of the Department of Ohio, ordered the arrest of Vallandigham and the closing of the Chicago *Times*.
4. During the March to the Sea, Sherman divided his army into two wings. Name their commanders.

February Program on Lincoln

February 10th: With the Lincoln birth bicentennial upon us, we have a special program by member Charlie Matson on Lincoln and his interest in armaments throughout the war. This will be a very interactive session, so come loaded with your curiosity and your questions, and look for some special treats from the Lincoln era!

Other Lincoln Info on Line

If you are interested in other information on Lincoln (and who isn't this "birth bicentennial" year!?), we urge you to go to the website of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois (www.alplm.co). If you have not yet visited this relatively new facility, it is highly recommended, and, of course, you can, while in Springfield, walk the streets that Lincoln walked for all those years that framed what he became in 1861 and visit the places that still remain to remind us of his pre-presidential years. The website has a veritable mountain of information about all sorts of upcoming events, including those in Springfield, in other parts of the country and future webcasts that will be available in February and beyond.

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Or on the web at <http://mypage.iu.edu/~rawatson/roundtable> .