

Story Is Told of First Local Company to Fight in Civil War

Today marks the sixtieth anniversary of the formation of Fort Wayne's and, indeed, Indiana's first company of volunteer fighters. On this day 60 years ago, 100 Fort Wayne boys went to the field of battle, without even a thought of what military discipline meant.

Out of the ranks of the 100 fighters, all of whom were mere lads who accomplished what patriotism alone can accomplish, there remain today, but two white haired veterans to answer the roll call for the Fort Wayne and Allen county boys. Samuel S. Koller and Joseph Kieckieff, comrades 60 years ago, and comrades today, are once more meeting, but not on the field of battle. The two veterans have agreed that they will meet each year to celebrate the anniversary of their enlistment, by making alternate visits to their homes.

A brief sketch following the trail of old Company E is given in the story which follows.

(By E. R. Lewis.)
The old command was made up entirely of Allen county boys, and in this sense the word "boys" is used most literally, for practically all who answered that first call to arms were headstrong striplings. Few if any had cast a ballot and some even served four years before reaching their majority. But as has been the case in every war in which the United States has been engaged, the city children were fought by boys. In the union ranks alone, over 300,000 were the age of eighteen and under, while the southern armies were notorious for having soldiers in great numbers who were scarcely sixteen years of age.

Answering the Call.
Old Company E represented the

patriotic youths of Fort Wayne who rallied to the call to the colors, when the signal gun which burst above Fort Waunder had awakened the north as one. It was "Joe" and "Sam" and "John" and "Pete" and "Charles" and but little attention was paid to rank by these soldiers of the north, the first to represent Fort Wayne as well as Indiana in following Old Glory into battle. The sound of drums and shell of rifles awakened martial echoes in the streets while the flag of Washington and Yorktown was flung to the breeze once more by the patriotic citizenry. Recruiting stations were opened in various parts of the city, and recruiting meetings were held, at which time there was sounded the note of a defiant union triumphant over all foes.

Company E was not long forming. Its ranks filled up rapidly when on April 15, 1861, came the news of the fall of the proud fortress in Charleston's harbor. In three days after Lincoln's call for troops, the first Fort Wayne company had reached battle strength and was ready to leave for the front which it did on April 15, 1861.

Off For the Front.
That was a never-to-be-forgotten day in the history of old Fort Wayne which retells in a great historical past stretching from the early revolutionary days down through "Mad Anthony" Wayne's subjugation of the Indians and the saving of the old stockade through the courage and endurance of the pioneers and Columbus's backwoodsmen in the war of 1812 was to witness the departure of its sons in defense of a republic threatened with dissolution and disruption.

The young soldiers gathered at the Hedekin House, which was the headquarters. Then forming in line they marched down Barr street, accompanied by throngs of people, and were given a rousing send off at the old Wabash station. Recollections of the laughter and tears, of fond goodbyes, of mother's embraces, and of the thousand and one incidents of those exciting days will come thrilling to the minds of the little band of survivors today, for though nearly sixty years have come and gone since they started for the front, the heart will ever hold dear their own participation in that struggle which has been called "the most heroic age in our country's history."

At Camp Morton.
Thousands of people shouted and waved farewell as the little company of volunteers entrained. They were under orders to report at the rendezvous which later became historic Camp Morton, named after Indiana's famous war governor. Teaching Indianapolis, they went to the camp, and were the equipped, together with other companies, with uniforms of blue, consisting of cap, blouse and trousers, heavy army shoes, blankets, knapsack and other necessities, and other field equipment. Their arms consisted of the old style muzzle loader Springfield rifle with bayonet attached, and a sword in a type of leather belt with metal scabbard and the letters "U. S." stamped thereon, along with the box of percussion caps and the cartridge box. In those days it took nine different movements to load these guns, and one of the rigid requirements of any soldier who sought enlistment was good teeth. Answering the growl of one would-be recruit, that he didn't want to eat the rebels, what he wanted was to shoot them, the recruiting sergeant was careful to explain that no one could shoot unless he had good teeth, for the reason that the soldier had to bite off the end of each cartridge before it was placed in the barrel and driven home with the ramrod, otherwise there would be no explosion when the percussion cap had to be taken from the box and placed in position, when the piece was ready to be discharged.

Many amusing incidents have been told of excited men shooting away their ramrods which they had neglected to remove from the barrel, or of "belching" when they rammed through a mistake they rammed home two or three cartridges before firing the gun.

Regiment Organized.
From raw recruits to skilled soldiers, however, was a speedy transformation, for Americans have long since proved their ability to assimilate things military. Discipline came more slowly. Graduating from their camp ground kindergarten of army routine, the Fort Wayne boys at length found themselves a unit of the famous fighting regiment of volunteers and became Company E, Ninth Indiana Infantry. The regiment was organized and mustered into the service of the United States April 25, 1861, to serve three months, with Robert H. Milroy as colonel. Other companies of Indiana volunteers made up the remaining nine units of the regiment.

On Its Officers.
"Fort Wayne's own," Company E, was commanded by Capt. William Segur, with Henry Whitman first lieutenant and William Storey as second lieutenant. Robert H. Harrison was orderly sergeant, or as it would be now known in army routine, top sergeant. Other sergeants were Brutus A. Bourke, John Scherer and Henry W. Lawton. The last name has one which has shed a glorious lustre through over 40 years of American history, for the Indiana soldier who died on the battlefield in the civil war on June 2, 1861. In the campaign it was in the column of Col. Benjamin F. Kelly, when an all-night march through the darkness and pelting rain of a terrific thunder storm the troops marched in silence toward the camp of the enemy. At many points the gloom was so impenetrable that marching companies could not see the backs of those ahead of them, and only the flashes of lightning kept them from going astray the road, while the thunder and nature's artillery gave a foretaste of the battle to come.

The Battle at Dawn.
The experiences and feelings of the

young soldiers who were going into action for the first time will never be forgotten by them. Not a word was spoken; only the shuffle of feet or a falling stone causing someone to stumble, as the column wended its way into the long black night. Drenched and weary Ohio and Indiana marched on, knowing that at the break of day they were expected to be in line of battle for the first time against their enemies. With thunder streaks of dawn, as the marchers neared Philippi, which was the camp of the southern forces, the battle opened with a surprise attack, in which the confederates were defeated through the participation in that struggle which has been called "the most heroic age in our country's history."

Capture Enemy's Flag.

In the impetuous early morning attack, which took the enemy by surprise, members of Company E, all Fort Wayne boys, were on the firing line and helped to drive the enemy over the covered bridge, which spanned the river at this point. In going through the old-fashioned town of Philippi, they discovered that the confederates were still waving from the staff over the Philippi court house. So precipitate had been the retreat and so great the confusion of its defenders that they were given no opportunity to save their colors.

Quickly laying aside their guns, the eagerness of the chase being forgotten, a squad of the Fort Wayne boys made their way into the old building and climbed to the belfry. The flag, the stars and bars of the new-born confederacy of the south, was still flying from the top. But this handicap was overcome when Samuel S. Koller was boosted up on the shoulders of his comrades. He grasped the balyards, brought the flag within reach, and quickly he passed it to the man beneath, who happened to be the brilliant officer and later battle victim, General Henry W. Lawton. The flag, with a story to tell, was captured, and was for many years on display in the relic room of historical exhibits in the state capital of West Virginia.

Battle Experiences.

As was natural under the conditions, there was but little marksmanship but plenty of noise and waste of powder in this first engagement. Enough ammunition was expended to account for all the combatants and the civilian population as well, but there were few killed and only a small number of wounded. Incidentally the battle was of the utmost importance, for it gave the union troops a confidence in themselves which never wavered, and taught them that although they were at the best but recruits, that they were the equals in battle of the vaunted soldiers of the south.

While on picket many ludicrous incidents occurred which were told with many guffaws around the blazing campfires. One soldier in the ranks of Company E, believing that he saw an enemy creeping upon him, alarmed the whole outpost sentries by firing his rifle. Investigation revealed that the enemy was only a powerful stump doing sentinel duty along the roadway.

Saw Wounded Man.

Private "Joe" Kieckieff, a member of Company E who met with his old comrade again today on the anniversary of their departure for the war, recalls one incident of Philippi which is more than passing interest. Early in the battle, a shot from the union artillery shattered the leg of a confederate soldier, who was carried into an old building, for protection against the storm of bullets. When the southern line gave way and surrendered the town, the western surgeons established a field hospital in the structure, and there found the confederate soldier lying in a stall, weakened from loss of blood. His leg was amputated above the knee. The time came when the sight of a wounded man or even of a dead one, attracted but little attention from the hardened veterans of the western armies, but the incident narrated above will serve to indicate the boyish curiosity of these young volunteers.

Other Battles.

Returning to Gratton, the Ninth Indiana was assigned to General Morris' brigade and participated in all the movements and skirmishes in the midsummer campaign which resulted in the clearing of the rebel forces out of that section of the state. There were engagements at Laurel Hill, or Tealings, where a battle at Carrick's Ford, where the southern leader, General Garnett, was shot while attempting to rally his men, and where his dead body was later picked up out of the water. Ordered north at the expiration of its three months' term of service, the regiment arrived in Indianapolis the last week in July and was discharged from the service. The members of Company E returning home, were accorded a heroic reception when they reached Fort Wayne.

Home Again.

They were met by great crowds of citizens, headed by bands, and were escorted to the old market place located at a point near where St. Joseph's hospital now stands. Here the soldiers were seated to a sumptuous repast. Nothing was too good for the returning heroes, and they were treated and welcomed officially by the mayor and city officials of Fort Wayne, while bells and whistles sounded out a chorus in honor of their home-coming.

But Two Remain.

Out of that gallant band but two now remain. All the rest have passed on in the silence and have bivouaced forever on the Field of the Wounded Arms. Each year as they have met the ranks have dwindled. Eight years ago there were seven survivors, but the deaths of William McElvaine, C. W. Fairfield and John E. Parker reduced the little band by half. One veteran of Company E, Samuel Parrier, was located two years ago at El Paso, Tex., but since then nothing has been heard of him and he is thought to have "passed in review" with the rest of his comrades whose names adorn the starred honor roll of old Company E.

One of the proudest possessions of the two gray-haired survivors of the outfit is the fact that every man after following the colors through the three months' service did not feel that his duty was done until they had re-enlisted. Some joined the guidons of the Eleventh Indiana battery and fought through from Corinth to Franklin and Nashville. The old Thirtieth and Eighty-eighth Indiana claimed many more of the old Company E boys. Others went into the regulars and the various Allen county regiments which were recruited and organized at Camp Allen in the fall of 1861.

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