

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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THE FORGOTTEN REGIMENT



The Forgotten Regiment is the title of a newly published book on the history of the 151st New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment by Paul Stephen Beaudry. It follows the men of the regiment from their enlistment in 1862 to their deactivation in June 1865. The majority of the soldiers were from Western New York, from Rochester to Buffalo, including all the towns along the banks of the Erie Canal. The book has been published by InChem Publishing of Cleveland, Ohio and includes innumerable photographs and maps. The Forgotten Regiment is available locally at the Book Shoppe in Medina, the Lockport Historical Society, The Holland Land Office Museum in Batavia and the Cobblestone Museum Gift Shop in Childs. This 262-page soft cover book sells for \$12.95.

Let me give you a few quotes from this publication to suggest the reading flavor: "A regiment consisted of 10 companies, between 850 and 1010 officers and men depending on its mission. It was commanded by a colonel who was supported by a field staff of 8 officers, 4 sergeants, and 2 principal musicians. A company was commanded by a captain and included a first lieutenant and a second lieutenant, a first sergeant, 4 platoon sergeants, 8 corporals, 2 musicians, a wagoner, and 82 privates.

"It was understood of course, that all members of the company stood ready for combat, with the exception of the musicians. The duties of these very young soldier musicians was to sound the daily calls for their individual units and play in the regimental band for special events. In July, 1862, Congress, in its wisdom, prohibited officially sanctioned bands below the brigade level. Consequently, regimental bands were very informal. Most drummer boys became the "fetch-it-boy" for the Company officers and NCOs. In a combat situation, the nature of the musician's assignment meant that he accompanied the company commander everywhere to communicate the appropriate order on the bugle, drum, or fife. This duty put the musician in a position of peril in combat since officers were favorite targets of Rebel sharpshoo-

ters. Many of the Union drummers were wounded during the war, several of these youngsters were highly decorated for their courage under fire. At least one drummer boy was awarded the Congressional Metal of Honor for his heroism. Orion P. Howe, a 14-year-old member of the 55th Illinois Infantry Regiment, was honored with this award for his actions at the Battle of Vicksburg."

Our photo accompanying this article from the book shows a Western New York drummer boy. To quote again: "The youngest Union troops were musicians, most often referred to as 'drummer boys'. While the minimum age for a soldier was 18, there had been no minimum for drummer boys until congress passed a law, on March 3, 1863, decreeing 16 as the absolute minimum age of enlistment."

This book is by no means dry reading as so many quotes are used from diaries, letters, and newspaper accounts at the time. From the book again I find this interesting paragraph: "The men were sent to Camp Church immediately after enlistment or, in some special cases, after the fall harvest. Camp Church was located on the Lockport fair grounds where the annual county fair was in progress. The arriving "troops" were separated from the "public fair" by a rope stretched around the perimeter of their encampment. Guards were also posted not to keep the public out but to keep the troops from joining the festivities. It was during this fair that an incident took place which seemed to typify life in the "camp" and the culture of Western New York in the mid 19th century. "The Lockport Daily Journal & Courier reported in its September 27th, 1862, issue, "We learn that the Guard House at Camp Church was pretty well filled yesterday for various 'deviations'. We learn that one soldier was confined for kissing his girl 'across the line'".

The Forgotten Regiment not only touches on incidental matters such as the above but also focuses on the vital role and distinctive contribution the Regiment had in the course of history during the Civil War.