

Extra! Extra!

THANKSGIVING WITH CO. H OF THE 105TH OHIO VOLUNTEER INFANTRY

A FAMILY AFFAIR

On Aug. 9, 1862, Peter Spittler (Grandma Minnie's father) and his brother George J. Spittler enlisted in Co. H of the 105th Ohio Volunteer Infantry. Within a few days, the company also included their cousins Isaac Patterson Cowden Raub and Samuel Kercher Raub. Isaac and Samuel Raub were brothers and were also cousins of Peter Spittler's wife Elizabeth Kariher (you see, Peter's uncle Samuel Raub married Elizabeth's aunt Magdalena Kariher - I know, it gets confusing). And to complicate family relations even further, the company also included Joseph H. Flaughner, who was a cousin of Elizabeth and of the two Raub brothers. (See, I told you it gets confusing!) As I look at the names of the other members of Co. H, I recognize some of them as fellow Springfield Township, Mahoning County, residents and/or as fellow members of the Springfield Evangelical Lutheran and German Reformed Church, the church where these men were baptized as children and where they later took their own children to be baptized. In Co. H, there was little need for introductions.

THE FIRST THANKSGIVING

In 1863 President Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November a national holiday. The first official Thanksgiving, which fell on November 26, was not officially celebrated by the Union troops. They just didn't have the resources. Besides, some of them had more important concerns.

Co. H of the 105th Ohio was at that time, and for the rest of the war, attached to the 2nd Brigade, 3rd Division of the 14th Army Corps of the Army of the Cumberland. For a month, Federal troops were involved in a siege of Chattanooga, TN, (a vital Confederate railway center), and on November 23 the Battle of Chattanooga began. The Army of the Cumberland took Orchard Knob, a Confederate outpost a little over a mile in front of the Confederate-held Missionary Ridge. The next day, in dense fog, nearby Lookout Mountain was taken by General Joseph Hooker's men.

And on the 25th, the Army of the Cumberland was ordered to advance and take the rifle pits at the base of Missionary Ridge and then wait for orders. According to Co. H's 1st Lt. John C. Hartzell, "Under fire all day...we had two lines of Johnnies in sight all day, one at the foot of the ridge and one at the top. I don't know how it

was, but we all seemed to raise up and start at one time, the colors taking the lead and flanks hanging back, just as you see a flock of wild geese flying. It was quite a distance to charge and get so near the ridge as to be safe from the bursting shells, which kept up the most spiteful music. The low works at the foot of the ridge were well manned, but we jumped right over them."



George J. Spittler

Their objective attained, the Army of the Cumberland should have stopped there...but they didn't.

Gen. Ulysses S. Grant stood watching the assault through a pair of binoculars and was astonished and enraged by the sight of the Union men continuing up the hill. Soon a

mass of Federal troops were laboriously scrambling up the side. "Who ordered those men up the ridge?" he demanded of Gen. George Thomas, who was in charge of the Army of the Cumberland. "I don't know. I did not." An aide stated, "They started up without orders. When those fellows get started, all hell can't stop them." First Lt. Hartzell later wrote, "So far the evidence goes to show that the advance was ordered only to the foot of the ridge, and when General Grant saw the men take the lower works and keep right on he inquired very sternly who gave the order for advance, and, as the event seemed in grave doubt, no one claimed the honor, and I believe no one claims it yet; so the best explanation, I think, is that the men were working for \$13.00 a month and wanted to get in a full day on this occasion." The Confederates fled in disarray and confusion, and in a rare case of a frontal assault succeeding against entrenched defenders holding high ground, Missionary Ridge fell to the Federals. Hartzell commented, "There were two of the greatest surprises ever known, one for us and one for our enemy. We were never expected to take the hill, and they never expected us to make the attempt; but here we were, and where were they?"

The men camped on Missionary Ridge for the night and “there the fitful lights of our little chunk fires showed two horsemen, slowly picking their way through groups of weary fellows, and as, here and there, some attempt was made to get out of their way, a low, pleasant voice said kindly, ‘Lie still, boys, we will be careful not to hurt you, lie still. Had a good time today, didn’t we? We got even with them. Lie still and take your rest.’ These were Generals Grant and Thomas.”

They awoke the next morning to find the “commissary was on hand by daylight; we were filling our haversacks and cartridge boxes, and were soon off, some for the south and others for Knoxville. Our route was south after Bragg. It was Thanksgiving Day.”

THANKSGIVING 1864

On Nov. 16, 1864, the 105th Ohio left Atlanta, GA, in ruins and took up their position as part of the left wing of Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman’s famous (if you’re a Northerner) or infamous (if you’re a Southerner) March to the Sea. The troops had been told to pack light because they were to move fast, so fast that they’d outdistance their chain of supply. They were to live off the land, taking what they needed and destroying what they didn’t as they went along. “Where a million of people find subsistence, my army won’t starve,” Gen.

Sherman wrote to Gen. Grant. And starve they didn’t.

Whereas the previous November, members of the 105th Ohio had eaten a meager diet of corn, mush, beans, rice, and hard tack, with the occasional addition of meat or vegetables, in 1864 the members of Gen. Sherman’s army ate better than they would during their entire service. Brevet Major George Ward, aid-de-camp to General Sherman, wrote in his diary, “Near Tennille Station, on the George Central Railroad, November 27th. - We had been told that the country was very poor east of the Oconee, but our experience has been a delightful gastronomic contradiction of the statement. The cattle trains are getting so large that we find difficulty in driving them along. Thanksgiving-day [November 24] was very generally observed in the army, the troops scorning chickens in the plenitude of turkeys with which they had supplied themselves.

“Vegetables of all kinds, and in unlimited quantities, were at hand, and the soldiers gave thanks as soldiers may, and were merry as only soldiers can be. In truth, so far as the gratification of the stomach goes, the troops are pursuing a continuous thanksgiving.

“In addition to fowls, vegetables, and meats, many obtain a delicious syrup made from sorghum, which is cultivated on all the plantations, and stored away in large troughs and hogsheds.

The mills here and there furnish fresh supplies of flour and meal, and we hear little or nothing of ‘hard tack’ – that terror to weak mastication. Over the sections of country lately traversed I find very little cultivation of cotton. The commands of Davis appear to have been obeyed; and our large droves of cattle are turned nightly into the immense fields of ungathered corn to eat their fill, while the granaries are crowded to overflowing with both oats and corn.”

Thanksgiving evening was spent near Milledgeville, the recently conquered capital of Georgia. A company of soldiers from Indiana were eating their foraged Thanksgiving feast when a group of emaciated Andersonville prison escapees stumbled into camp. The sight “sickened and infuriated” the troops, their colonel remembered. “An officer may instruct, command and threaten the men, but when foraging they think of the tens of thousands of their imprisoned comrades, slowly perishing with hunger, they sweep with the besom of destruction.”

THANKSGIVING 1865

By Nov. 30, 1865, the war was over. On January 31, Congress had passed the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery. On March 4, President Lincoln had been inaugurated for his second term of office. On April 9, Gen. Robert E. Lee had sur-

rendered to Gen. Ulysses S. Grant near Appomattox Court House, VA. On April 14, President Lincoln had been shot by John Wilkes Booth at Ford’s Theatre in Washington D.C., dying the following day. And at 9 o’clock on the morning of May 24, the 105th Ohio had set out on their last march, Gen. Sherman leading his great army from the Capitol building down Penn-



Peter Spittler

sylvania Ave., past President Andrew Johnson, Gen. Grant, and thousands of onlookers, perhaps receiving the loudest cheers of any who participated in the two-day Grand Review.

Of our family circle in Co. H, only Isaac P. C. Raub did not return from the war. He died of sunstroke Dec. 25, 1863 in Chattanooga, TN, where he is buried. Peter and George J. Spittler, Samuel K. Raub, Joseph H. Flaughter, and the other surviving members of Co. H, however, were able to go home and resume their old lives and, one hopes, put the memories of their first two Thanksgivings behind them and begin new Thanksgiving traditions with their families.