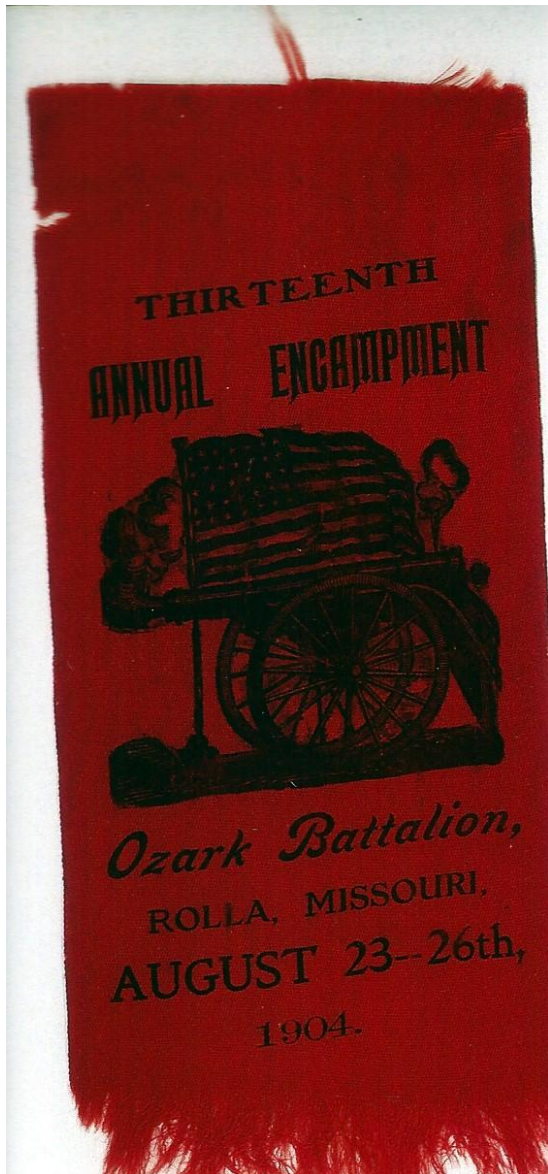


The Ozark Battalion by Walt Busch



During its existence in Missouri and other states as well, the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) had posts in many towns departments serving all 48 states. All of these answered to a national organization. However, the desire for camaraderie led camps to create associations of camps in some geographical areas. This allowed for the veterans to socialize more often than just at the annual department encampment.

In Missouri, a Southwestern Veteran's Organization is known through a few old newspaper articles. That group formed around the Joplin-Neosho area.

However, as of this writing, the most is known about the Ozark Battalion, which was created from GAR posts in the south-central Missouri area. They held annual encampments or meetings in the area of Rolla, St. James, Salem and Cuba and existed from at least 1892 to 1907.

Some of the posts most likely in this unofficial branch of the GAR include:

Cuba Post 263; Capt. G.T. Porter Post 445 of Steelville; Dixon Post 355; Capt. Bradway Post 421 of Crocker; B. Wicker Post 434 of Richland; and, Howe's Mill Post 483. There may have been some posts from Gasconade, Maries and Franklin counties as well.

The Ozark Battalion is memorable even today as it was one of the few such



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organizations to raise funds to create their own monument. The monument can be seen in Oak Grove Cemetery on Hwy 32, on the east side of Salem, MO. It stands on four cemetery lots (1st addition #34-37).

The monument measures approximately 18 feet high and while two sentences of text are not readily readable, the monument clearly has chiseled into its unusual two-tone gray marble the words “Union Soldiers- GAR– 1861-1865” and “Ozark Battalion”. Around the monument rest several Union soldiers. Dedicated in 1901, as recorded in the September 26th *Lawrence (KS) Weekly World*, the monument’s unveiling ceremonies were followed by an election of new officers of the organization.

On August 14, 1902, *St. Louis Republic* recorded that the tenth annual encampment of the battalion began on the 12th and that speakers included B.P. Russell of Steelville; Henry Clymer of Cuba; W.P. Elmer of Salem; Professor W.H. Lynch of Mount Grove; and A.L. Reeves of Steelville. The program included a camp fire (a common ritual for the GAR) and music.

In an article from 1907, we learn that the group had its own band as well. D.S. Myers, a former resident of Iowa served in the 6th Iowa Infantry as a drum major. *The Charilton [IA] Leader*, reported on September 5, 1907, that he was now a drum major in the Ozark Battalion and was challenging anyone to beat him in performing the long roll.

Most likely, the organization passed out of existence around 1915 as by then the majority of Union soldiers had also by then passed on.

If you have any more information about this group, the Southwest Veterans Organization, or other similar groups, we would like to hear from you at wbusch@suvcwmo.org

SOURCE Readings:

The St. Louis Republic., August 14, 1902, Page 3, Image 3

Ozark Battalion Meets.

REPUBLIC SPECIAL.

Salem, Mo.. Aug. 13. The tenth annual encampment of the Ozark Battalion of Union soldiers began here yesterday. B. P. Russell of Steelville, Mo., addressed the old soldiers last night. Henry Clymer of Cuba, Mo., spoke this morning, and W. P. Elmer of Salem this afternoon. The camp fire and music at night draw large crowds. The encampment will last

over tomorrow, when Professor W. H. Lynch of Mount Grove, and A.L. Reeves of Steelville, will speak.

1907 Ozark Battalion reunion had a badge. A copy is in the State Historical Society of Iowa's files.

From the Lawrence (KS) Weekly World 26 Sep 1901

Ozark Battalion Monument.

Hartville, MO., Sept. 24 --- 'The unveiling of the Ozark battalion monument will occur at Cedar Grove cemetery in Dent county, at ten a.m., September 26. New officers will be elected at that time and the annual reunion will be in session. Prominent men will make addresses.

From the National Tribune, June 28, 1894, Page 6, Image 6

Missouri. —

The Ozark Battalion of the G.A.R. will hold its Encampment at St. James, Aug. 15, 16 and 17.

From The Chariton Leader, Chariton, Lucas County, Iowa; Thursday, September 5, 1907

'Myers A Good Drummer'

D.S. MYERS is having a big time down at Rolla, Mo., if the reports are any indications. There was recently a big Grand Army gathering there and from a copy of the Rolla Times the following is taken (his photo also appeared):

"D.S. MYERS, drum major, in the 6th Iowa Infantry is now drum major of the Ozark battalion. Major MYERS is 70 years old and served three years in the Civil War. He is a native of Ohio but most of his life has been lived in Iowa. He came to Missouri a little over a year ago and located on the Phelps county farm, 3 miles east of Rolla. The major is an expert drummer in Southern Iowa. He very properly declares that he wouldn't lay down the drum sticks for any man living when it comes to beating martial music. The major's favorite is six-eight double drag time. He says he can give the long roll in such a fashion that his hearers will not soon forget they heard it. He is not afraid of jeopardizing his position as a drummer but is willing to compete for honors with any drummer who thinks he knows anything about martial music. It may be possible that a contest between the major and some other aspirant for honors may be arranged before the encampment closes. The major is a good story teller and has an unusual memory for war incidents."

