



MISSOURI'S REGIONAL GAR VETERAN ORGANIZATIONS

By Walter Busch, PDC

It's truly an amazing experience to attend a Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War National Encampment and it really had to be a marvelous one to attend a Grand Army of the Republic Encampment. The stories that must have been swapped at some of these! The opportunity early on to see General Logan, Sherman or any of the other victors against the rebels. But not everyone had the opportunity to attend one. Money, work, illness, and age would keep many at home. Such issues would also probably be the case for attending a department encampment. Hence, I believe, the reason that regional associations were created.

To help instill in each member the importance of the organization above the level of their own Posts, Departments apparently needed a mid-level organization. Regional veterans' associations were the result. These groups were not the same as groups like the Central Region Association of the Allied Orders that still exists today and include all the various orders. They consisted of only veterans. After finding my first such organization, I'm now on the lookout for more. To date, I know that Kansas and Michigan had such groups holding reunions and creating camaraderie.

The first such organization I discovered was the Ozark Battalion. I found it when I saw a monument in Oak Grove Cemetery in Salem, MO, and wondered what the heck the Ozark Battalion was. The monument is chiseled into an unusual two-tone gray marble with the words "Union Soldiers- GAR- 1861-1865" and "Ozark Battalion". The marbling makes the letters difficult to read. After some research, I found out they had at least 16 regional encampments and had their own band! Its members were generally from the posts in the Phelps, Dent and Crawford County areas.

After finding out about this organization, I soon started seeing ribbons from other ones. Dallas County, nowadays, is mostly underwater because of Stockton Lake, but around the turn of the century had as many as five posts. They had their own regional county association. An aptly named Southwest Veterans Association was in the Neosho, MO, area. Just recently, I found a ribbon advertizing the Ozark Union Veterans' Association. Since its ribbon indicates an encampment at West Plains, MO, it most likely existed in the deep south central Missouri Ozarks.

I haven't found any such associations for the St. Louis or Kansas City area yet, but with 27 GAR posts in the St. Louis area and 13 in the Kansas City (Jackson County) area having existed, it will be surprising if there was not a regional group. After researching the Missouri Department Encampment records I found 13 such organizations mentioned by name ; many just named as reunions, and one that was called "South Missouri and North Arkansas District Encampment" (it was part of two departments of the GAR)! Strangely, one group named the Osage and Gasconade Battalion, which would indicate Posts in those counties, held a reunion in Tuscumbia, Miller County and their Commander was from Eldon in that county.

To date, I have only found ribbons from these organizations, but I know there is one medallion out there. The 1907 encampment of the Ozark Battlion had a medal forged and is in the files of the State Historical Society of Iowa. So, medals, canteens or other paraphenalia were made and, as you can see, do not generally state they are a unit of the GAR.

