



The Union Defender

The Newsletter of Phelps Camp No. 66,
Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War



June 2023

WHAT HAPPENED AT THE MAY AND JUNE MEETINGS?

The May meeting was cancelled so that members could attend the Lieutenant Johnson headstone dedication ceremony in Lebanon (see later in this issue). The June meeting was cancelled as several camp officers were out of town.



NEXT CAMP MEETING

The July meeting will take place on Saturday, July 8 at 2 p.m. at Wilson's Creek National Battlefield.

MEMORIAL DAY

Members of Phelps Camp joined the Sons of the American Revolution and other veteran, patriotic and descendant groups at the Springfield National Cemetery for Memorial Day on Monday, May 29. We marched with the other groups in the "Parade of Flags" through the cemetery, then went to nearby Hazelwood Cemetery to visit the graves of Colonel John S. Phelps and Mary Whitney Phelps.



HONORING LIEUTENANT JOHNSON

On May 13, members of Phelps Camp joined a large crowd of Laclede County residents to dedicate a new headstone for Lieutenant Robert Johnson of the 16th Missouri Cavalry, who was murdered in May 1865 while being held as a prisoner of war by Confederate guerrillas. Remarks by former Camp Commander Bob Clanton, a local historian, Senior Vice Commander Patrick, the presentation of a wreath and colors, a musket volley and prayers marked the occasion. Our thanks to the members of Phelps Camp who attended, formed the color guard, and made remarks.



HISTORICAL NOTES

“Death Claims Last Member of the Famous Artillery Trio.

Joseph M. Pesch One of Those Who Braved the Guns of Vicksburg During the Siege.

The death of Joseph M. Pesch of No. 1811 Lasalle Street, yesterday morning, marked the passing of the last of the trio of St. Louis artillerymen who voluntarily braved the guns of Vicksburg and successfully ran the blockade with a steamer loaded with the guns and horses of their battery during the Civil War. The act of valor attracted the attention of General Grant, who was in command of the Union forces investing Vicksburg, and Pesch, F.W. Guerin and Henry A. Hammond, who were also from St. Louis, were recommended for medals of honor. The latter were afterwards conferred by Congress.

Mr. Pesch was born in Germany, but had been a resident of St. Louis for nearly fifty years. He was 68 years old. With his parents he came to the United States when 17 years old. He resided in Rochester, N.Y., for four years and then moved to Missouri.

When the Civil War began Mr. Pesch enlisted in Battery A, First Missouri Light Artillery. After several minor engagements, Pesch's battery was assigned to the Union forces attacking Vicksburg. During the investment General Grant decided to extend his lines to the south of Vicksburg, and it became necessary to transport several brigades below Vicksburg.

It was found to be impracticable to run the batteries with steamers loaded with men, as it was feared that the loss of life would be too great. Orders were accordingly issued for the division to move overland.

Scouts informed General Grant that it

would be impossible for the horses to drag the artillery over the swampy roads. It was then decided to load the horses and guns on a dilapidated steamer called the Cheeseman.

Volunteers were called for to accompany the vessel, and Pesch, Guerin, Hammond and two others volunteered.

On the morning of April 28, 1863, the steamer, accompanied by a small tugboat, called by courtesy a gunboat, started to run the Vicksburg batteries. When opposite Grand Gulf the opposing army discovered the Federal boats, and opened fire.

The stern wheel and rudder of the Cheeseman were soon shot away, and its small consort proved unequal to the task of guiding the larger boat, with its valuable freight.

The two practically helpless steamers drifted close to the shore, and were raked by the Confederate fire. Horses and mules were killed and wounded, but the little band of volunteers escaped without injury.

The predicament of the Cheeseman was discovered by one of the larger gunboats, which made a dash to its assistance, and succeeded in passing a line and dragging the Cheeseman below the fortifications.

After the war, Mr. Pesch returned to St. Louis.”

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