

Civil War History A Big Hit for Springwater-Webster Crossing Historical Society Meeting By *Judy Tripp-Neu*

More than 30 people came out Tuesday evening for the Springwater-Websters Crossing Historical Society's monthly meeting. Brian West of Websters Crossing spoke on a subject near and dear to his heart, the Civil War. Specifically he detailed the campaign that took William Tecumseh Sherman through the South and into Atlanta and on to Savannah, Georgia. He also spoke on the role the NY 136th Infantry Regiment known as the "Ironclads" played in the success of this campaign. The 136th was recruited by Colonel James Wood, Jr., and organized at Portage. The companies were sworn in on September 25-26, 1862 and were signed for three year enlistments. Companies B, C, and I had several recruits from Springwater.

William Tecumseh Sherman (February 8, 1820 - February 14, 1891) was an American soldier, businessman, educator, amateur painter and author. He served as a General in the Union Army during the American Civil War (1861-65), for which he received recognition for his outstanding command of military strategy as well as criticism for the harshness of the "scorched earth" policies that he implemented in conducting total war against the Confederate States. History books call him the first "modern general" and to this day his strategies are taught and studied in military schools. German Field Marshall, Erwin Rommel, was known to have studied thoroughly Sherman's strategies and employed them in North Africa during World War II.

Sherman, known affectionately by his fellow soldiers as "Uncle Billy" was admired by his men for his "wink and blink" type of advance. According to West he often chose not to engage the enemy directly as much as outmaneuver them by doing the unexpected. He was a master of psychological warfare. As part of his campaign planning, he studied census records to ascertain where the wealthiest, most productive areas were located so he could travel light but feed his men well. He sent out "bummers" dressed in costumes to forage for food, animals, and any material possessions that could be converted into money to support the war effort.

Sherman was considered a very harsh commander and believed that the enemy should be punished for seceding from the Union. He was known to use prisoners of war as human detonators of improvised explosive devices that the Confederates had planted along the roadways. He had no qualms taking the last resources from the enemy even if it meant that women and children would starve during the harsh winter months. Sherman, who graduated sixth in his class at West Point, seldom slept and often joined his men around the campfire. He had suffered what many believe was a nervous breakdown in 1862.

[His early military career had not been spectacular. He saw some combat during the Second Seminole War in Florida, but unlike many of his colleagues, did not fight in the Mexican-American War, serving instead in California. As a result, he resigned his commission in 1853, took work in the fields of banking and law briefly and unsuccessfully before becoming the superintendent of the Louisiana Military Academy in 1859. At the outbreak of the Civil War, however, Sherman resigned from the academy and headed north, where he was made a colonel of the 13th United States Infantry.]

Sherman first saw combat at the Battle of First Manassas, where he commanded a brigade of Tyler's Division. Although the Union army was defeated during the battle, President Abraham Lincoln was impressed by Sherman's performance and promoted him to brigadier general in 1861, ranking seventh among other officers at that grade. He was sent to Kentucky to begin the Union task of keeping the state from seceding. While in the state, Sherman expressed his views that the war would not end quickly, and was replaced by Don Carlos Buell. Sherman was moved to St. Louis, where he served under Henry W. Halleck and completed logistical missions during the Union capture of Fort Donelson. During the battle of Shiloh, Sherman commanded a division, but was overrun during the battle by Confederates under Albert Sydney Johnston. Despite the incident, Sherman was promoted to major general of volunteers on May 1, 1862.

After the battle of Shiloh, Sherman led troops during the battles of Chickasaw Bluffs and Arkansas Post, and commanded XV Corps during the campaign to capture Vicksburg. At the battle of Chattanooga Sherman faced off against Confederates under Patrick Cleburne in the fierce contest at Missionary Ridge. After Ulysses S. Grant was promoted to commander of all the United States armies, Sherman was made commander of all troops in the Western Theatre, and began to wage warfare that would bring him great notoriety in the annals of history.

By 1864 Sherman had become convinced that preservation of the Union was contingent not only on defeating the Southern armies in the field but, more importantly, on destroying the Confederacy's material and psychological will to wage war. To achieve that end, he launched a campaign in Georgia that was defined as "modern warfare", and brought "total destruction" upon the civilian population in the path of the advancing columns of his armies. [Commanding three armies, under George Henry Thomas, James B. McPherson, and John M. Schofield,] Sherman employed his superior numbers to consistently outflank Confederate troops under Joseph E. Johnston, and captured Atlanta on September 2, 1864.

After the fall of Atlanta, Sherman left the forces under Thomas and Schofield to continue to harass the Confederate Army of Tennessee under John Bell Hood. Meanwhile, in December 1864, Sherman cut off all communications to his army and commenced his now-famous "March to the Sea," leaving in his wake a forty to sixty mile-wide path of destruction through the heartland of Georgia. [On December 21, 1864 Sherman wired Lincoln to offer him an early Christmas present: the city of Savannah.]

Sherman is quoted as saying "I am tired and sick of war. Its glory is all moonshine. It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for blood, for vengeance, for desolation. War is hell."

Following his successful campaign through Georgia, Sherman turned his attentions northward and began marching through the Carolinas, chasing the Confederates under the command of Joseph E. Johnston. He continued his campaign of destruction, in particular targeting South Carolina for their role in seceding from the Union first. He captured Columbia, South Carolina, on February 17, 1865, setting many fires which would consume large portions of the city. He went on to defeat the forces of Johnston in North Carolina during the Battle of Bentonville, and eventually accepted the surrender of Johnston and all troops in Georgia, Florida, and the Carolinas on April 26, 1865, becoming the largest surrender of Confederate troops during the war.

[After the war, Sherman remained in the military and eventually rose to the rank of full general, serving as general-in-chief of the army from 1869 to 1883. Praised for his revolutionary ideas on "total warfare," William T. Sherman died in 1891].

As a side note, one soldier in the NY 136th Infantry Regiment, Pvt. Dennis Buckley, of Company G, captured the battle flag of the Confederate 31st Mississippi, knocking down the Confederate color bearer with the butt of his musket and wrenching the colors from his grasp. While Buckley was waving the captured flag defiantly at the ranks of the enemy a bullet fired at him struck the flagstaff, glanced off, and hit him in the forehead, killing him instantly. A year or more after the war ended the War Department awarded posthumously the Medal of Honor to the mother of Dennis Buckley, in recognition of his "heroism at the battle of Peach Tree Creek and the capture by him of one of the enemy's flags."

On the morning of July 22d the brigade advanced within two miles of Atlanta, where it occupied various positions during the siege that followed. For six weeks the 136th laid in the trenches before the city under fire daily, many of the men being killed or wounded while in the works, which, towards the close of the siege, were advanced to within close range of the enemy's lines. The Confederate troops evacuated Atlanta during the night on September 1st, and the Twentieth Corps, now under command of General Slocum, entered the city and took possession. "Atlanta was ours, and fairly won."

With the occupation of the city came a period of rest and quiet for ten weeks, a pleasing respite from the privations and dangers of the previous campaign. On November 15, 1864, refreshed and strengthened by its stay at Atlanta, the regiment started with Sherman's army on the March to the Sea.

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The army arrived at Savannah, December 11, 1864, and immediately laid siege to the city, which was evacuated on the 21st.

After a month's stay at Savannah the army started northward January 16, 1865, on the campaign of the Carolinas, arriving at Goldsborough, NC on March 24th, after a march of 454 miles, part of which was made over difficult roads and over many rivers and swamps, some of which had to be waded through.

During the after remarks, Leola Moore Teed, wife of Harvey Teed, stated she has entered approximately 1018 names of men who served in the NY 136th VOL Infantry Regiment. Find A Grave is a free website where genealogists and historians can find many graves of ordinary people with added notes or photos added by family members. It is a fascinating research tool, a virtual cemetery, but also interesting for anyone who loves to search in graveyards.

Mr. West was heartily applauded for his presentation and we look forward to hearing more from him in the future.

*** Please note: Bracketed information comes from several sources on the History of the Civil War and the NY 136th VOL Infantry Regiment.