

**Book Review: *Heroes of the Western Theater: Thirty-Third Ohio Veteran Volunteer Infantry.*** Lois J. Lambert. Milford OH: Little Miami Publishing Company, 19 Water Street, Milford OH 45150-0588. 2008. 559 pages, \$45, clothbound. <<http://www.littlemiamibooks.com/>> or <<http://www.ljlambert.com/>>. Reviewed by Dan Reigle.

Lois Lambert's new book is a superb addition to available regimental histories on Ohio Civil War units. It is rich in content, and written so as to be of value to either the reader who is very knowledgeable on battles, personalities, and units, or the reader whose current knowledge is limited to popular history. Its content will make it a valuable reference book for those researching Ohio in the Civil War, but its narrative makes a straight-through reading interesting and engaging. The author has located and makes effective use of nine manuscript collections related to the 33rd, as well as articles from the *Scioto Gazette* and *National Tribune*, the *Official Records*, and many secondary sources.

The core of this book is the fact that the 33rd OVI served for nearly the entire war, from October 1861 until July 1865, participating in the major western campaigns in the Army of the Ohio and later the XIV Corps. Their service included Perryville, Stones River, Chickamauga, Lookout Mountain, Resaca, Kennesaw Mountain, Atlanta, the March to the Sea, Averasboro, and Bentonville. 1278 officers and enlisted men served in the unit, including 135 who died from disease, 48 who died as prisoners of war, and 119 who were killed or mortally wounded in battle. Lambert's unit statistics reveal information not often found in regimental studies, such as the unit's strength at various points during the war, and the fact that 145 draftees and 59 substitutes served in the unit for one year as a result of the 1864 calls (pages 52-53.) Three Ohio counties (Ross, Pike, Scioto) each produced 200-255 of the unit's men, while four more counties (Hardin, Adams, Gallia, Meigs) each produced 50-100 men of the 33rd (page 48.)

The 33rd's history provides many subjects of interest, starting with its first commander, Joshua **Sill**. For insights into this young officer, the author draws heavily on the Ross County (OH) Historical Society's fascinating collection of **Sill**'s letters from his West Point years until his death, on subjects ranging from the food at the US Military Academy ("Our fare is very good if it had the good quality of always being clean," page 18) to his lack of interest in commanding a regiment of volunteers ("I am much more sorry that I ever accepted the appointment [to command the 33rd OVI] and do hope something will turn up to get out of it ... if I felt I was destined to remain in charge of a regiment of volunteers, I would feel miserable enough," page 37.) Despite his reservations, **Sill** was a very successful commander of volunteers, and his early death at Stones River on 31 December 1862 came after promotion to brigadier general and assignment as a brigade commander. With this biographical sketch enlivened by **Sill**'s own words, many readers will have a better sense of the shock and loss that his death brought to the Union Army and to his unit.

The 33rd is also known as a unit that provided eight of the volunteers who made up **Andrews'** Raiders in the famous operation in April 1862 that was intended to use a captured Confederate locomotive north of Atlanta to break the Confederate supply lines to Chattanooga, and facilitate an early Union capture of that city. The 21st OVI supplied nine volunteers and the 2nd OVI, five, all led by a civilian, James **Andrews**. All of the raiders were captured when the operation failed. **Andrews** and seven of the volunteers were executed in Atlanta as spies, including Samuel **Robertson** and Samuel **Slavens** of the 33rd. The author devotes a chapter to this operation, given the importance of the 33rd's participation, and provides an excellent summary using both contemporary accounts and recent research. Jacob **Parrott**, an 18-year-old from the 33rd, received a whipping of more than one hundred lashes while being interrogated, but did not divulge the names of his comrades; a year later in a ceremony in Washington, Secretary of War **Stanton** chose **Parrott** to receive the first Medal of Honor ever awarded by the U.S. Six of **Parrott**'s 33rd colleagues and nineteen total members of the Andrews operation received the Medal. The author also includes an examination of the accusations made by the 33rd's John **Wollam** and Daniel **Dorsey** that another raider, William **Pittinger** of the 2nd OVI, had betrayed his fellow raiders under interrogation, and was therefore responsible for the deaths of the seven men. These questions are not totally resolved to this day, but the answers were clear for **Wollam**; he refused to attend an 1886 reunion of the raiders because **Pittinger** would be there.

At Chickamauga, the 33rd's service as part of MG George **Thomas'** "Rock of Chickamauga" defense of Snodgrass Hill resulted not only in fifteen deaths, but in 88 men captured. Lambert builds an excellent chapter to recount the prisoner of war experiences of these men, of whom over half died in captivity. Imprisoned at Andersonville,

Danville VA, Richmond, and Atlanta, some of these men left letters and diaries that the author uses to describe the experience of the 33rd's POW's in the larger context of general POW history. For example, Nelson **Purdum**'s papers at the Ohio Historical Society describe how he used a Confederate shell jacket to simply walk out of Libby Prison in Richmond. Charles **Pomeroy**'s manuscripts at the US Army Military History Institute describe his efforts to "impersonate" a captured Union surgeon authorized to care for sick and wounded fellow prisoners. **Purdum** and **Pomeroy** survive captivity to return to the 33rd in the field, but **Pomeroy** died later in the Atlanta Campaign. Captured at Chickamauga, Warren L. **Johnson** moved north to be held in Richmond at Belle Isle and Smith's Factory, then moved south to prison at Danville VA and finally to Andersonville, 2016 miles by his count. His diary provides graphic descriptions of Andersonville conditions and events, including the execution in July 1864 of six fellow POW's convicted by the prisoners themselves as "raiders" who terrorized their helpless colleagues. An example from **Johnson**'s diary: "Saturday, July 30, 1864: Weather very hot. I went down to see James **Scott**, Company H, Thirty-third Ohio; he has the scurvy very bad; my scurvy is still getting better." (Page 227.) **Scott** died on 24 September 1864.

While General **Sill**, the **Andrews** Raid, and prisoners of war illustrate the valuable content of this book, I would also point a number of its features that, to me, mark its high quality. It is heavy in content, with 350 pages of narrative text and 150 pages devoted to an extensive, expanded biographical roster of the men who served in the 33rd. It is quite a difficult task to address the many campaigns and battles in which a unit as active as the 33rd participated without either getting lost in the detail or offering so little information that the significance of a Snodgrass Hill or a Resaca is lost to the reader who needs more background. In addition, it is difficult to weave together the reports and correspondence in the *Official Records* with the comments from letters or diaries in a way that is smooth and engaging. In my opinion, Lois Lambert has succeeded admirably in both respects, bringing together a variety of sources, both unique and standard, in a narrative that thoroughly recounts the history of an active regiment without bogging down in the process.

For the "Annotated Roster of the Officers and Men of the Thirty-third Veteran Volunteer Infantry," Lambert has relied upon the *Official Roster of the Soldiers of the State of Ohio* (including its Roll of Honor section and its specification of the veteran volunteers), the National Archives' pension index and individual pension files in some cases, the 1890 Special Census of Veterans and Widows, burial records, court-martial records, discharges recorded at the county level, Kevin Frye's Andersonville database, and county-level sources (histories, marriages, deaths, and cemetery records.) This required an enormous research effort, and will be a valuable resource for anyone interested in the 33rd OVI specifically or for anyone interested in the demographics of a Midwestern infantry regiment with a stellar service record. However, do not infer that this section of the book would be too "boring" just to read through; these sketches, though brief, offer some flashes of insight into the types of men who served and the types of experiences they survived. Examples:

- "**Pomeroy**, Charles R. First Lieutenant. Age 20. Entered October 11, 1861, for three years. Captured September 21, 1863, while trying to retrieve the body of Major Ephraim **Ellis** who was killed on September 20, 1863, at battle of Chickamauga. Lt. **Pomeroy** was imprisoned at Libby Prison and was presumed to be a doctor. He was assigned to administer care of Northern prisoners. Exchanged November 25, 1863. Promoted from 2nd Lieutenant Co. I on March 15, 1864. Killed August 13, 1864, in battle near Atlanta, Georgia. Lt. **Pomeroy**'s letters are referenced throughout the manuscript." (Page 370.)

- "**Scott**, James H. Private. Age 21. Entered September 5, 1861, for three years. Captured September 20, 1863, at battle of Chickamauga, Georgia; died September 7, 1864, in Rebel prison at Andersonville, Georgia, of gangrene. Soldier is buried at Andersonville in grave no. 9645."

- "**Minshall**, Thaddeus A. Captain. Age 27. Entered October 14, 1861, for three years. Mustered out October 10, 1864, on expiration of term of service. On September 12, 1899, soldier applied from Ohio for a pension under application no. 1,235,358 and received it under certificate no. 996,406. **Minshall** served on the Ohio State Supreme Court from 1886 to 1902, and was chief justice of the Court in 1889, 1890, 1895, and 1901." (Pages 255, 472.)

- "**Johnson**, James J. Private. Age 18. Entered October 9, 1861, for three years. On August 1, 1863, soldier faced a court-martial under the charge of desertion for a period of sixteen months from a furlough. Notes indicate that soldier was 17 years old when he enlisted and that the file contained a surgeon's certificate stating that soldier suffered a disability from measles. Verdict was guilty and soldier was sentenced to eighteen months loss of pay. Soldier was killed September 20, 1863, in battle of Chickamauga, Georgia. Soldier is buried in the National Cemetery at Chattanooga, Tennessee." (Page 506.)

In addition to the comments above on the text and roster, the book is greatly enhanced by its maps, photographs, tables, and index. While complaints about lack of maps or poor quality are a standard comment in Civil War book reviews, that will not be the case with this book. The twelve maps include a two-page frontispiece map that includes all of the states in which the 33rd marched or fought, as well as excellent maps of several battlefields. A county map of Ohio illustrates that by the end of the war, the 33rd included men from at least 60 of Ohio's 88 counties. Vanita Hipkind, a graduate assistant in the Geography Department at the University of Cincinnati at the time, prepared the maps, and we agree with the author that Ms. Hipkind made an "important contribution to the book."

Second, the book offers a generous display of more than 100 excellent photographs, drawn mostly from Larry Strayer's superb collection, from the Library of Congress, and from modern photographs by Tutt Lambert. Many of these photographs are not often seen, or may never have been previously published. If a reviewer is permitted to select a "favorite," I would select the photograph (page 265) of an elderly James **Montgomery**, a private in Company A who was wounded in the hand and wrist at Resaca. Seated on his front porch, his white beard and hair and his friendly appearance might cause an observer to not notice the glove on his right hand, until the caption explains that the glove was worn to conceal the injury caused when gangrene invaded his wounds and "left a hole in the back of his hand the size of a teacup," a reminder that some of the war's effects lived as long as the veterans did.

Third, the author has provided 25 tables throughout the book, with information such as "Soldiers of the 33rd Ohio Who Died at Andersonville," "Men from the 33rd Captured at Chickamauga," and "**Purdum's** Mailing List for the 1912 Reunion of the 33rd Regimental Association." Several tables are offered to illustrate the command structure in which the 33rd served at various times, a very helpful resource for the reader to quickly put the regiment in its brigade, division, corps, and army level contexts, with the names of relevant commanders. This is often an essential piece of information for the researcher who wants to find reports and correspondence in the *Official Records*, or who wants to locate the regiment on maps that only offer division-level or brigade-level symbols. Finally, the book includes a detailed 38-page index that will greatly facilitate the use of this book as a reference source.

*Heroes of the Western Theater* will be an engaging and worthwhile book for general readers interested in the experiences of a Midwestern infantry regiment in the west. It will be an even more valuable reference tool for researchers working on the major battles and campaigns in the theater, as well as issues of unit composition, social and economic background, prisoners of war, drafts, the 1864 election, military justice, and many other aspects of the war.

Editor's Note: For more on Lt. Alvah **Mauk** of the 33rd, see *OCWGJ*, "Alvah **Mauk's** Reenlistment Furlough, 33rd OVI: Excerpts from his Diary," submitted by John Culbertson, Volume X, 2006, Issue 4, pages 184-186. Mr. Culbertson has placed in the OGS Library a transcript of Lt. **Mauk's** diary from enlistment to October 1864. Excerpts from the diary and Lt. **Mauk's** photograph are included in *Heroes of the Western Theater*.

Photographs:

- Review\_33rd OVI\_Chickamauga monument. jpg. 33rd OVI Monument at Chickamauga. Photo courtesy of Tutt Lambert.
- Review\_33rd OVI\_cover.jpg. (No caption necessary.)