

Major-General Godfrey Weitzel
Delivered at Spring Grove Cemetery,
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In 1953, John Cronin, the editor of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* wrote: “Cincinnati’s affinity to her river has been an influence on the lives of many of her sons. But in none was this influence more closely allied to his role of distinction than in the career of Godfrey Weitzel.” Even though Major-General Godfrey Weitzel had a distinguishing career in the Union army during the American Civil War, the mark he left on the civil engineering world was equally impressive. (1)

Godfrey was born to Ludwig and Susanna Weitzel on November 1, 1835, in the town of Winzlen in the state of Rheinpfalz, Germany. When Susanna became pregnant again a few months later, the family immigrated to the United States, where Ludwig hoped to make his fortune. They immediately settled in Cincinnati, Ohio. In order to avoid the discrimination that fellow Americans showed toward German immigrants, Ludwig and Susanna claimed that their son had been born in Cincinnati. Even Godfrey did not reveal the truth about his heritage until late in his life, after public resentment toward the German-American community had faded. Henry and Kate Ford, who published a short biography of Godfrey Weitzel while he was still alive, cited the following evidence: “That Weitzel is a German by birth is proved by the fact that he is a member of the German Pioneer society of Cincinnati, to which only German natives are admitted.” (2)

Within weeks after the Weitzels arrived in the city in 1836, Godfrey’s brother, Louis Weitzel, Jr., was born. Godfrey and Louis became the closest of siblings. They were educated in the Cincinnati Public Schools together, attending class at the Tenth District School at 12th & Vine Streets until Godfrey was moved into the first class at Central High School. They also helped their father run the family grocery in the city’s Over-the-Rhine district. (3)

However, Godfrey Weitzel was not destined to lead a life of obscurity. Weitzel was described as having “a mathematical head.... When at school, he displayed an aptness for figures that enabled him to outstrip most of his competitors, and singularly enough, while other boys would engage in the usual games in winter, it was his delight to build fortifications with snow and play soldiers.” In 1849, Godfrey graduated from Central High and went to work at the firm of Eggers & Company on the corner of 4th Street and Bank Alley. He was employed at the firm for only a few months when, in 1850, he earned an appointment to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point. The appointment came at the influence of U.S. Representative David Tiernan Disney, a Democrat who had also been educated within the Cincinnati Public Schools and who had practiced law in the city for many years.

Weitzel showed a great aptitude toward engineering and the military, graduating 2 of 34 in the West Point Class of 1855, the last year that Robert E. Lee was the superintendent of the academy. Before leaving West Point, Weitzel passed an examination that earned him the rank of Brevet 2nd Lieutenant of the Corps of Engineers, a position only given to the best students. (4)

Godfrey Weitzel's first engineering assignment was to design, build, and repair the land defenses for the city of New Orleans, Louisiana. He performed this work under the supervision of P. G. T. Beauregard, who promoted Assistant Engineer Weitzel to the full rank of 2nd Lieutenant in August 1856. He completed his Louisiana assignment in August 1859 and was ordered to West Point, where Weitzel was appointed to the position of Assistant Professor of Civil and Military Engineering. (5)

Before leaving for New York, Godfrey Weitzel began courting a girl he had known from his old neighborhood of Over-the-Rhine in Cincinnati. The young lady's name was Louisa C. Moor, the 19-year old daughter of Augustus and Anna Marie Moor. Since Augustus Moor was a fellow German and a military man himself, Moor did not hesitate to give his blessing when Lieutenant Weitzel asked for his daughter's hand in marriage. Godfrey and Louisa were married in Cincinnati on November 3, 1859. The happy couple immediately left for West Point, New York, where they would enjoy their honeymoon while Godfrey started his new assignment at the academy. However, three weeks into their honeymoon, tragedy struck. On November 24, 1859, as she walked passed a fireplace grate, Louisa's skirt caught fire. Before the flames could be extinguished, Louisa suffered severe burns over large portions of her body. She died the same day. The grief-stricken husband sent a telegram that night to the Moors, informing them of the terrible death of their only child. Louisa's body was shipped back to Cincinnati a week later, where she was buried in August Moor's family plot at Spring Grove Cemetery. (6)

While on leave in 1860, Godfrey Weitzel returned to Cincinnati and stayed with his in-laws, Augustus and May Moor. Weitzel was promoted to 1st Lieutenant later that summer, and he continued his professorship at West Point through January 1861. Godfrey was then ordered into Company A, Corps of Engineers, stationed at Washington, D.C. When Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated as President of the United States, Weitzel's company served as the President's bodyguard. (7)

After the surrender of Fort Sumter in April 1861, Weitzel was ordered to Fort Pickens, Florida, where he reconnoitered Confederate lines located across Pensacola Bay. On October 1st, Weitzel was recalled to West Point, but was then sent to report to Brigadier-General Ormsby Mitchel in Cincinnati. As Chief Engineer, he helped to design the fortifications of Cincinnati while he recruited troops into Company D of the Corps of Engineers. In December, Major-General George McClellan ordered Weitzel into the Corps of Engineers attached to the Army of the Potomac, where he constructed some of the defenses of Washington and built pontoon bridges for the army in Virginia. With his reputation as an effective military engineer becoming widely known, Lieutenant Weitzel was again reassigned, this time to Major-General

Benjamin Butler's army in Louisiana. As Butler's Chief Engineer, Weitzel as a guided the army through the Confederate defenses of New Orleans, which he had constructed in the late 1850's. His intimate knowledge of the defenses contributed greatly to the successful capture of the Crescent City in the spring of 1862. Godfrey served as Butler's second-in-command, and he was acting mayor of New Orleans for a short time. During the summer he helped raise the black regiments known as the Louisiana Native Guards, and he supervised the construction of the fortifications at Baton Rouge, Louisiana. (8)

On August 29th, Weitzel was promoted to Brigadier-General of Volunteers, and less than a year later, he was promoted to Captain, Corps of Engineers. Weitzel led a division under Major-General Nathaniel P. Banks at the Siege of Port Hudson, Louisiana, from May through July of 1863, and soon after, he effectively maneuvered his troops in the Bayou La Fourche campaign and the Sabine Pass expedition. (9)

However, Weitzel asked to be transferred from the Department of Louisiana, and his wish was granted in April 1864, when he was reassigned to Major-General Benjamin Butler's Army of the James near Petersburg, Virginia. While there on double-duty as Chief Engineer and as commander of the 2nd Division, 18th Corps, he oversaw the construction of the defenses at Bermuda Hundred and the various pontoon bridges on the James and Appomattox Rivers. One of these bridges would be used for Grant's famous movement on Petersburg later that summer. On August 29th, Weitzel was made a Brevet Major-General of Volunteers and was given the command of the 18th Corps in October. In November, he earned the full rank of Major-General of Volunteers and in December took command of the newly formed 25th Corps, which was composed entirely of U.S. Colored troops. In this position, Godfrey was able to appoint his brother, Captain Louis Weitzel, 1st U.S. Volunteers, as an aide-de-camp on his staff. Major-General Weitzel led the land assault in the first Battle of Fort Fisher, North Carolina, that same month. Although the attack was an utter failure, the blame fell upon on Butler, who was relieved of command. Weitzel returned to duty in Virginia. (10)

While on furlough in Cincinnati, Weitzel married 22-year old Louise Bogen, the daughter of Peter and Wilhelmina Bogen, on January 6, 1865. The Bogens were a prominent German family of Cincinnati. They owned a pork-packing plant and a successful winery specializing in Catawba wines. (11)

In February 1865, Lieutenant-General Ulysses S. Grant ordered Weitzel to take command of all the Union forces north of the Appomattox River. After the fall of Petersburg on April 2, 1865, Weitzel moved 9,000 men of his corps toward the Confederate capitol at Richmond. They entered the city virtually unopposed on the morning of April 3rd, after which he sent a famous one-line telegram to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. It read simply: "We entered Richmond at 8 o'clock this morning." (12)

Weitzel and his staff set up headquarters at Jefferson Davis's abandoned house. He escorted President Lincoln on his visit to the captured Rebel capitol, but only days later, the general became embroiled in a scandal in which he was accused of allowing the Confederate Congress to meet in Richmond. Later Weitzel and his 25th Corps were sent to guard the border of Texas and Mexico, a duty that he considered as one of his most difficult assignments. Godfrey Weitzel was mustered out of the volunteer army in March 1866. He then returned to active duty in the U.S. Corps of Engineers, his rank reverting to that of Captain. (13)

In August 1866, Godfrey Weitzel was promoted to Major in the Corps of Engineers as he began work on the design of one of his greatest engineering achievements – the expansion of the canal at the Falls of the Ohio. The Falls of the Ohio at Louisville, Kentucky, had always been a significant menace to Ohio River shipping and commerce. Major Weitzel designed and constructed a canal that took ships safely around the falls on the Indiana side of the river. The feat was considered a civil engineering breakthrough, and Cincinnati business owners were forever grateful to Weitzel for the completion of the Louisville & Portland Canal. (14)

On February 16, 1868, Godfrey and Louise had their second child, Blanche Celeste Weitzel. Tragedy would again arrive in the Weitzel household when their 1-month old daughter contracted the measles and died on April 5th. Godfrey and Louise buried their daughter next to their son in the Augustus Moor plot in Spring Grove Cemetery. (15)

In 1870, Weitzel served on the Board of Engineers in Cincinnati to plan the placement of bridges over the Ohio River. He also spent time creating improvements for shipping lanes on the Cumberland, Tennessee, Wabash, and Mississippi Rivers. Weitzel was ordered to Detroit, Michigan, in 1873 to engineer a canal lock on the Great Lakes at Sault Sainte Marie. He successfully designed and built the Weitzel Lock for the famous Soo Canal on the St. Marys River. The 515-ft. lock was the largest of its kind in the world at the time it was completed in 1881. During their stay in Michigan, Godfrey's wife, Louise, bore their third child, Irene, on April 11, 1876. She was the last and only surviving child of Godfrey and Louise Weitzel. Many years later, Irene would marry Allen N. Nye and would move to Minnesota, where she lived to the age of 60. (16)

The Corps of Engineers reassigned Major Weitzel when poor health affected his duty. He was ordered to Philadelphia in 1882, where he performed mostly office work. Two years later, on the morning of March 19, 1884, Major Godfrey Weitzel died of typhoid fever at his home on 102 South 36th Street in Philadelphia. Four days later, his body was returned to his hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio. Although Weitzel had wanted a private funeral, the city could not hold back its emotion for this famous engineer and military hero. Awaiting the arrival of the remains were the 1st Ohio National Guard and Jacob D. Cox with fellow members of the Cincinnati Society of Ex-Army and Navy Officers. They accompanied the body to the English Lutheran Church on Elm Street between Court and 9th, where the funeral was held in front of a

capacity crowd. During the procession from the church to Spring Grove Cemetery, thousands of citizens lined the streets to do homage to the general. The city's newspapers touted the spectacle as the largest gathering seen for a funeral in many years. (17)

The *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette* honored Major-General Godfrey Weitzel with these appropriate words: "In private life he was one of the most diffident and unassuming men. He was quiet in all his ways, and plain and practical in the discharge of all his duties. In his death the army and the Corps of Engineers loses one of its most capable officers, and society one of its best citizens." (18)

Among those of Godfrey Weitzel's relatives buried in the Peter Bogen plot:
(19)

- Godfrey Weitzel, Major-General of U.S. Volunteers and Major of the U.S. Corps of Engineers. Born Nov. 1, 1835, in Winzlen, Germany; died of typhoid fever on Mar. 19, 1884, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Parents: Ludwig & Susanna Weitzel.
- Louise (Bogen) Weitzel, wife of Godfrey Weitzel. Born in 1842 in Cincinnati, Ohio; died of senility on Aug. 18, 1927, in St. Paul, Minnesota. Parents: Peter & Wilhelmina Bogen.
- Irene (Weitzel) Nye, daughter of Godfrey & Louise Weitzel. Born on Apr. 11, 1876, in Detroit, Michigan; died of respiratory failure on Oct. 11, 1936, in St. Paul, Minnesota. Parents: see above.



(1)



(2)



(3)

Photographs of Godfrey Weitzel.

- (1) Brigadier-General Godfrey Weitzel [From Civil War Mysteries Collection, Image #P1111013101]
- (2) Brigadier-General Godfrey Weitzel [From Francis T. Miller, ed., *The Photographic History of the Civil War*, Vol. 5. (Secaucus, New Jersey, 1987), p. 193]
- (3) Major-General Godfrey Weitzel [From the Library of Congress]



Maj-Gen. Godfrey Weitzel and his staff. Photo taken by Mathew Brady. Weitzel is leaning on the railing under the left door column. [From The Multimedia Library (2001)]

Endnotes:

- (1) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 7, 1953.
- (2) Henry A. Ford and Kate Ford, *History of Cincinnati, Ohio* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1881), pp. 138-139; United States Census Bureau, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Cincinnati, Hamilton County, Ohio*; *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, March 20, 1884; Spring Grove Cemetery Office, *Records of Burials in Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati, Ohio* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 2001).
- (3) *Ibid.*; *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, March 20, 1884; United States Census Bureau, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Cincinnati, Hamilton County, Ohio*; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 20, 1884.
- (4) *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, March 20, 1884; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 20, 1884; United States House of Representatives, Office of the Clerk, *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress: 1774-Present* (Washington, D.C., 2001); Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1992), pp. 548-549; Henry A. Ford and Kate Ford, *History of Cincinnati, Ohio* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1881), p. 138.
- (5) *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, March 20, 1884; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 20, 1884.
- (6) Henry A. Ford and Kate Ford, *History of Cincinnati, Ohio* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1881), pp. 137-138; C. S. Williams, *Williams' Cincinnati Directory, City Guide & Business Mirror* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1861), p. 253; Spring Grove Cemetery Office, *Records of Burials in Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati, Ohio* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 2001); Jeffrey G. Herbert, *Restored Hamilton County Marriage Records – 1850-1859* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1998), p. 404; *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*, November 25, 1859; *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, November 25, 1859.
- (7) United States Census Bureau, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Cincinnati, Hamilton County, Ohio*; *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, March 20, 1884; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 20, 1884.
- (8) *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, March 20, 1884; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 20, 1884; Henry A. Ford and Kate Ford, *History of Cincinnati, Ohio* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1881), p. 138; Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1992), pp. 548-549; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 20, 1958.
- (9) *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, March 20, 1884; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 20, 1884; Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1992), pp. 548-549; Francis H. Kennedy, *The Civil War Battlefield Guide*, 2nd Edition (New York, 1998), p. 180.
- (10) *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, March 20, 1884; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 20, 1884; Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1992), pp. 548-549; United States War Department, *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, I, 42, pt. 3, p. 818; Maj. Godfrey Weitzel, "Entry of the United States Forces Into Richmond, Virginia, April 3, 1865 -- Calling Together of the Virginia Legislature and Revocation of the Same," from *Letter Press of Correspondence, Official Reports, Financial Statements, &c.* (Detroit, Michigan, 1881).

- (11) *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, March 20, 1884; Spring Grove Cemetery Office, *Records of Burials in Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati, Ohio* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 2001).
- (12) Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1992), pp. 548-549; *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, March 20, 1884; Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 4 (Secaucus, New Jersey, 1887), pp. 725-728; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 20, 1958.
- (13) Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 4 (Secaucus, New Jersey, 1887), pp. 725-728; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 20, 1958; Maj. Godfrey Weitzel, "Entry of the United States Forces Into Richmond, Virginia, April 3, 1865 -- Calling Together of the Virginia Legislature and Revocation of the Same," from *Letter Press of Correspondence, Official Reports, Financial Statements, &c.* (Detroit, Michigan, 1881); *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 20, 1884; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 7, 1953; Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1992), pp. 548-549.
- (14) *Ibid.*, p. 549; *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, March 20, 1884; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 20, 1884; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 7, 1953; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 22, 1884.
- (15) Spring Grove Cemetery Office, *Records of Burials in Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati, Ohio* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 2001).
- (16) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 7, 1953; *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, March 20, 1884; Spring Grove Cemetery Office, *Records of Burials in Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati, Ohio* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 2001).
- (17) Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1992), p. 549; *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, March 20, 1884; Spring Grove Cemetery Office, *Records of Burials in Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati, Ohio* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 2001); *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 22, 1884; *Ibid.*, March 23, 1884; *Ibid.*, March 24, 1884; *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, March 21, 1884.
- (18) *Ibid.*, March 20, 1884.
- (19) Spring Grove Cemetery Office, *Records of Burials in Spring Grove Cemetery, Cincinnati, Ohio* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 2001).

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