



“For Gud og Vort Land!: Three Years of Campaigning in the 15th Volunteer Infantry”

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The 15th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry has the distinction of being the only American Civil War (1861-1865) unit in either army composed entirely of Scandinavian immigrants. Of more than 6,500 Norwegians who served in the Union Army, some 3,600 enlisted in Wisconsin regiments, and of these, nearly 800 in the 15th Wisconsin. In its campaigns over three years in various Union armies in the western theatre, it won a reputation for extraordinary courage, discipline,

and steadfastness under fire on such hellish battlefields as Stones River, Chickamauga, and Pickett’s Mill (New Hope Church). Outside of Wisconsin and the Norwegian-American community, the ‘Scandinavian Regiment’ is, unfortunately, overlooked.

The 15th had its origins in a September 1861 meeting in Madison of Norwegian politicians and officials, including state prison commissioner and future colonel Hans Christian Heg. These men expressed a desire to form a regiment of volunteers bonded by a shared language and customs, one of five more Wisconsin units mandated by President Lincoln after the initial call for 75,000 three-month Union volunteers in April 1861. Upon completion of recruiting in January 1862, the new unit comprised some 800-plus Scandinavians, mostly Norwegians but with a few Swedes and Danes and some Anglo-American regimental officers and staff. From the time it left Camp Randall in early March 1862 through completion of muster-out in February 1865, the 15th Wisconsin participated in a total of twenty-six engagements, from the siege of Island No. 10 to the capture of Atlanta, and along the way won the respect and plaudits of all Union commanders under whom it served and bled.