

Release from Camp Ford

The official main exchange day for the prisoners at Camp Ford was 22 May 1865. The 120th prisoners go to Shreveport.

[Published Monday, 29 May 1865 New Orleans Times, Vol 4, Issue 609, Page 1, available at GenealogyBank.]

Arrival of the Last of the Union Prisoners from Texas

Their Journey and their Treatment - Affairs at **Shreveport [Louisiana]**

"We are furnished by an officer of the 77th Illinois Infantry with the following facts:

The last lot of prisoners in the so called Confederacy, about **1700, have just arrived here from Camp Ford, Texas. They consist of large detachments from the 77th and 130th Illinois, 120th Ohio, 173d New York, 16th Indiana, 2d and 6th Kansas, and smaller detachments from the 28th, 32d and 14th Iowa, 87th Illinois, 50th Indiana, 162d and 165th New York, Chicago Mercantile Battery, and a number of miscellaneous squads from almost every State, together with the crews of the steamers Emma, City Belle, and John Warner; also, a few of the navy formerly of the Clinton and Morning Light.** The latter are the old set prisoners of the war, having been prisoners twenty-eight months."

"The trip from Tyler to the Mississippi was rather interesting. The collapse of the rebellion left us almost to our own resources. The guard at the stockade deserted us, and left us several days without a guard. We were then started for Marshall with an escort of about fifty men of the 15th Texas Cavalry, more than half of whom left us before reaching that point. No rations were issued to us until the third evening after starting, except beef which was driven with us, and then it was at our suggestion that rations met us from Marshall, between Marshall and Shreveport. The transportation for our sick left us between two days to avoid being taken by the troops who are appropriating to themselves every thing they can get in the shape of Government property."

"At Shreveport, we found matters all in a turmoil, no proper authority, and no security to persons or property, except such as is afforded by some Missouri troops who wish to surrender properly, and are endeavoring to keep the Government property together as well as they can, and with the citizens are anxiously awaiting the arrival of our troops. In fact, a fleet of our forces would be the most welcome thing that could be sent up Red River."

[Published in Daily Eastern Argus (Portland, Maine), 5 June 1865, page 2, available at GenealogyBank]

Apparently some other soldiers from Camp Ford went to New Orleans.

"The Union prisoners from Camp Ford, Texas, arrived at New Orleans on the 28th.-- **they represent Texas in a very confused state and say that there is a general desire for the Union forces to occupy the State.**"

Note: See the letter of Elias Fraunfelter to J. S. Petty for a description of this.]

[History of Summit County, by Perrin, 1881, page 703]

"He [Elias Fraunfelter] and Capt. Miller were the only ones exchanged at New Orleans in July, 1865, were furloughed home and mustered out at Columbus in August."

Daily Ohio Statesman [Columbus, OH], **21 June 1865**, page 2, available at GenealogyBank:

"Arrival of Paroled Men. -- One hundred and sixty paroled prisoners belonging to the 120th O. V. I., lately from Tyler, Texas, and more recently from Benton Barracks, near St. Louis, arrived at Tod Barracks [in Columbus] Monday night about 11 o'clock, and yesterday morning marched **to Camp Chase for muster out and discharge.** Four deaths occurred in the Regiment at Camp Ford, Texas, viz.: Wm. Parker, Co. B; Franklin M. Matz, D, Amos Kepner, E [should be company F], and Jacob Reed, I."

[Note: Those men who died at Camp Ford are buried at National Cemetery, Alexandria, Louisiana.]

What happened to John Rigdon?



John Rigdon

Pension information obtained by Debbie Ferdetta at the National Archives:

John Rigdon, Private, Company G, applied for a pension from Highlandville, Christian Co MO on 30 July 1890. Another notation was 26 Mar 1891, Sparta, Christian Co, MO. Question of desertion. Law Office of Charles and William B. King, Washington DC, 5 Jan 1895: "We are doing all we can to have the charge of desertion removed from claimant's military record."

John wrote: "Gents: I never have had a discharge, was in prison when the war closed at Tyler TX and was just turned loose. Respectfully, Jno. Rigdon."

John's request for a pension was rejected on 16 May 1895.

Note: John Rigdon is not on the list of 120th OVI soldiers who were released from Camp Ford prison at Tyler, TX, in 1865. So maybe John just walked away and didn't leave with the group

and so was not on the official list that was made when the prisoners were released.

Note from Jim Swearngin about Rigdon's trying to get his charge of desertion removed:

"I had contact with the historical society years ago about the prisoners at Camp Ford. I am trying to do this info from memory until I find my paperwork. I also got a neat book from them about the camp.

I also did some research on the US / CSA pows and was told that the CSA records were not well kept. Anyway during the research I found that when the war ended many pow's on both sides just left and went home as the gates were open and no guards. The majority of them were sick from their treatment as pows.

I also found in a book on the war that after it was over the Union side tracked down as high as 50 to 70 percent of the deserters. They were either shot or hanged. I talked to a base commander about this and was told as far as John Rigdon was concerned they knew where he was at but never went after him. Why?

Also he like many others felt since the war was over they didn't go back to the military. So they were never given a discharge. My entire family and ancestors were military. My ancestor Capt. Van Swearingen was a scout for Gen. George Washington. I don't know the whole story about John Rigdon but after so many deserters were executed why would they leave him alone knowing his location. He was also represented by the King Brothers who made lots of money representing those in similar situations. They were also shisters. **John did say he just walked out the gate and went home. He also had 2 witnesses who could verify his captivity. A Capt McKinney and another soldier.** They were never contacted but did get their pensions. One died and the other one was alive but never questioned.

It all makes for interesting reading and speculation but I don't know other than what we have. If he would have been a deserter I think he would have wanted to remain in the background and not draw any unwanted attention to himself. **The Ohio GS sent me papers and said he was not carried as a deserter.** However they were federalized and who knows for sure. His witnesses were not contacted, he was not executed."

[Note: John Rigdon was not the only soldier who had to get charges of desertion removed. It's too bad John did not get his pension. I think he can rest easy. Thank you for your service, John.]

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