

Chapter 24 Release from Camp Ford

[[The Cleveland Leader, 29 May 1865, Morning Edition, page 1](#)] Available at [Chronicling America](#)

"From Fort Smith

Fort Smith, May 27.

Rebel deserters and escaped prisoners of the 32d Iowa Regiment, just arrived from Texas report that the Federal prisoners confined at Tyler, Texas, are allowed to escape in large numbers, the guards saying when they are all gone they will have nothing to do, and then can go home.

The enlisted men in the rebel army are unwilling to fight any longer, and do not respond to Kirby Smith's proclamation. They acknowledge themselves whipped, and are anxious for peace.

The surrender of the rebels east of the Mississippi was not credited at first, but it is now generally believed."

According to the historical society at Camp Ford, the official main exchange day for the prisoners at Camp Ford was 22 May 1865.

The 120th prisoners go to Shreveport.

Location of Marshall, Texas, and Shreveport, LA.

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Marshall,+TX/@31.9990394,-95.1887481,8z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x8636f5dfa8038ca7:0x58332058355464a1!8m2!3d32.5448714!4d-94.3674184>

[History of the 77th Illinois volunteer Infantry, Sept 2, 1862 - July 10, 1865 / by Lieut. W. H. Bentley, with an introduction by General D. P. Grier.](#) By William H. Bentley, 1883, Peoria, Ill.

Available at [archive.org](#)

Page 302: "On the 13th of May, Captain Birchett, the paroling officer, came to the camp with a large mail and late Northern papers, confirming all the wild rumors they had heard. He informed them that they were to proceed at once to the mouth of Red river. Then a scene of joyous excitement was witnessed at Camp Ford."

"In this unsettled state of affairs, it looked as if the prisoners would have to find their way out of 'Dixie's Land' as best they could. But at length a train of nine wagons put in an appearance, and the remnant of the 15th Texas was ordered to escort them to Marshall, and there report to General Churchill. On the 17th of May they started. Seven of the wagons were used for carrying the sick; the other two were sent to Tyler for rations, to be issued on the way." **[They were headed for Marshall, TX, on their way to Shreveport, LA, basically retracing their steps when they had gone from Shreveport to prison in Tyler.]**

After walking a couple of days, the men were getting a bit rowdy when the rations did not arrive. "The next morning they started at three o'clock, and marched twenty-five miles in a very orderly manner. In the evening they camped by a pleasant stream

within six miles of Marshall." **The rations arrived and they killed beef to eat. At Marshall the Texans were replaced by Arkansas regiment under a Major Stuart.**

"He ...sent the sick by railroad to Greenwood. After reaching Shreveport they took steamers down the Red River to the Mississippi River and then to New Orleans."

Page 305: "On the 5th of June an order came from General Canby for the officers and men of certain Regiments - paroled prisoners - to proceed to Benton Barracks, at St. Louis, Mo., in charge of the senior officer of the detachments. There were eight hundred and twenty-two men and twenty-two officers, and they belonged to the following Regiments: 77th and 130th Illinois, **120th Ohio**, 162^d, 165th and 173^d New York, 23^d Wisconsin, 18th, 28th, 32^d, 33^d, and 36th Iowa. They arrived at St. Louis on the 12th of June where they received pay as commutation for rations while prisoners."

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

This article, which can be found at Genealogy Bank and which I may not quote here, has a really interesting description of the trip from Tyler up to Shreveport. But the above history is better anyway.

Arrival of the Last of the Union Prisoners from Texas

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

[[Chicago Tribune, 5 June 1865](#), page 2 column 3] Available at Chronicling America
Cairo, June 3. - The prisoners arrived at New Orleans from Camp Ford, Texas, consist of large detachments from the 77th and 130th Illinois, **the 120th Ohio**, 173^d New York, 16th Indiana, 2^d and 6th Kansas, and smaller detachments from the 28th and 165th New York, the Chicago Mercantile Battery, and a number of miscellaneous squads from almost every State, together with crews of the steamers Emma, **City Belle** and John Warner; also a few of the Clifton? and Morning Light. The latter are the oldest prisoners of war, having been prisoners twenty-eight months."

[[History of Summit County, by Perrin](#), 1881, page 703] Available at archive.org

"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, column 3 available at Chronicling America]

"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.]



John Rigdon

What happened to 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.]

END CHAPTER 24

Research by Susie Holderfield, 2001-2019

120researcher@gmail.com