

Book Notice: *The 26th Ohio Veteran Volunteer Infantry: The Groundhog Regiment*

Jeffrey A. Hill. Bloomington IN: AuthorHouse, 2010. \$36.95 soft bound; \$11.95 ebook. 800 pages, 17 maps and illustrations, gallery of 80 photographs. www.26thohioinfantry.com
Reviewed by Daniel H. Reigle for the *Ohio Civil War Genealogy Journal* and Cincinnati CWRT, 2011. All rights reserved.

This work is the product of eight years of intensive research by Jeffrey Hill, a descendant of two members of the 26th OVI. He began his focused work with his late father by building a website devoted to the 26th, www.26thohioinfantry.com, which not only became a repository for information that he gathered, but also led him to many other descendants of 26th OVI members, and expanded the research base.

The value of a history of the 26th is evident from their list of major engagements: Stones River, Chickamauga, Missionary Ridge, Resaca, New Hope Church, Pickett's Mill, Kennesaw Mountain, Peach Tree Creek, Atlanta; Columbia; Spring Hill; Franklin, Nashville. 56% of their force were casualties at Chickamauga. Of the 1200 men who served at some point in the 26th, 122 were killed or mortally wounded, 11 died as POW's and 85 from disease, putting them on Fox's list of "Three Hundred Fighting Regiments."

To write the history of a regiment as active as the 26th is a daunting task. The right way to do it is to apply what Professor James I. Robertson Jr has called "vacuum cleaner research," the term which he attributes to Allan Nevins, that describes collecting and evaluating evidence from every potential source. Mr. Hill meets that test admirably, tapping journals and letters written by unit members, newspapers, manuscript collections at several university and public institutions, historical societies and local libraries, archives at the primary battlefield parks and Andersonville, travel across nearly all of the areas traveled by the 26th, historians including *OCWGJ* Contributing Editor Kevin Frye at Andersonville, and personal collections of many descendants. Although the veterans themselves had attempted, with the leadership of former Captain John Raper, editor of *The Ohio Soldier* veterans' newspaper, to compile and publish a regimental history, they were unable to do so, cancelling their effort in 1894 "due to insufficient funds to pay their publishing costs." Mr. Hill's efforts are intended to fulfill "the unmet desires of those veterans of the 26th Ohio who long since departed," and it is my opinion that he has clearly done so. They would be pleased with and proud of this book.

As an example of the detailed research reported in this book, *OCWGJ* found it to be an important resource in addressing our question on the Columbus photographer Solomon Woolley, who spent the winter in Fayetteville (see 2011-07 in this issue.) The town of Fayetteville (W)V was the most southern point of the Federal line during that winter, and was occupied by troops from the 23rd OVI, 26th OVI, 30th OVI, McMullin's Battery, and a Pennsylvania cavalry unit. This book enabled us to identify the specific units in that location for winter quarters, and includes an excellent discussion of the unit's winter at Fayetteville, including incidents such as the arrival of two large "care packages" from home with winter clothing and blankets that were greatly needed during the severe winter.

Fifty-five pages are devoted to a corrected and supplemented regimental roster, adding the results of current research to the original entry in the *Ohio Official Roster*, and seven pages to a listing of known burial locations (over 300 by my estimate.) Any researcher will be pleased to find more than fourteen pages of primary sources in the bibliography with each chapter containing more than 100 precise citations, and careful citation of photo credits. The seventeen maps are essential to a book of this scope and are well done, with enhancements and sketches to add to clarity. Two of them are devoted to the alignment for the assault at Kennesaw Mountain, including a detailed sketch of the alignment of the five regiments in Wagner's Brigade in "column by divisions" in the fateful attack on 27 Jun 1864. The regiment lost nine killed or mortally wounded, and more than 20 wounded in this engagement. Captain Walden Kelly's post-war accounts described the regiment taking a new stand of colors from the ladies of Chillicothe into this assault. The flag received three bullets through the staff and 57 through the colors themselves, while the color sergeant was killed and several of the color guards killed or wounded. Kelly wrote: "Go see the flag in the State House, Columbus. The marks on the staff are still showing." (Editor's note: we cannot state for sure if this is the flag to which Kelly referred, but the Ohio Historical Society's current online photographs of 26th OVI flags includes only one regimental color, at <http://ohsweb.ohiohistory.org/portal/battleflags-p.shtml>.)

This is an excellent modern regimental history, a fitting tribute to the members of the Groundhog Regiment, and certainly a benefit to those of us seeking to know and understand what happened now 150 years ago.