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Paul Sward

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From Hälsingland to Bloody Shiloh and beyond

A Swedish - American farm boy in the American Civil War. Part 1

By PAUL SWARD

When I began my foray into Swedish genealogy, I discovered that I had a number of distant relatives that had served in the American Civil War. In searching for background material, I found that much had been written about German and Irish immigrant soldiers, but I found very little on Swedes. However, enough has been written to provide a basic understanding of Swedish-American involvement in the Civil War. In particular, I found Roger Kvist's articles on the Swedish Union Guards,¹ and the Galesburg Light Guards,² as well as his article on the social history of Swedish-Illinois units in the Civil War,³ very helpful. Those articles along with Nels Hokanson's work on Swedish immigrants and Olson, Schön, and Engberg's *History of Swedes in Illinois*, served as a foundation to begin my inquiry.⁴

Subsequently, I obtained the military and pension records of the Swedish relatives that I had identified who had served in the Civil War. As I examined these records, one individual in particular captured my interest.

Andrew Engstrom (Anders Engström)

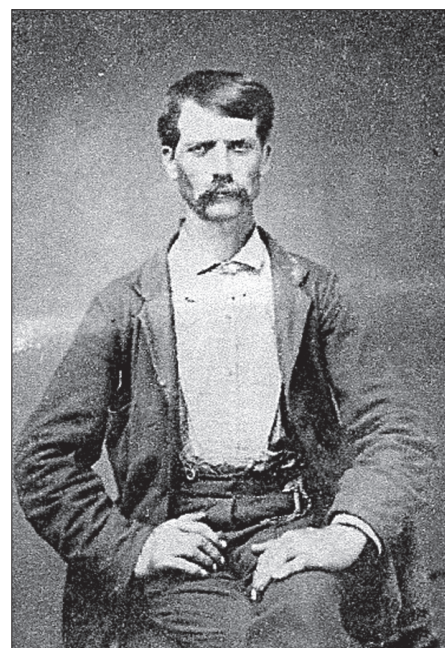
Anders Engström was born in Viken #9, Alfta Parish, Gävleborg län,

Sweden, on May 26, 1842, to *Bonden* Per Jönsson Engström and Carin Andersdotter.⁵ Church records indicate that Per Engström with his wife and five children departed from the parish on July 15, 1853, for North America.⁶ In one of Anders's obituaries, it states that the family sailed from Gävle to New York arriving after eighty days at sea.⁷

The Engström family journeyed to Illinois where they joined the Bishop Hill Colony that had been founded by the Janssonist religious sect. Bishop Hill Church records indicate that Per Jönsson Engström and family became members in 1853.⁸ Per Engström and family appear in the 1860 Illinois Federal Census with the last name of Angstrom, farming in Weller Township (Bishop Hill Post Office), Henry County, Illinois. At this point Anders is identified as Andrew.

Swedish-American Volunteers

On April 15, 1861, President Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers to serve for three months to repress the rebellion. By the end of the war approximately 2,250 Swedes had enlisted in the Union army. The state of Illinois alone provided in excess of 1,300 Swedish soldiers.⁹ In response to the first call for volunteers, the Galesburg Light Guards, which had



A tintype kept in the family, believed to be Andrew Engstrom.

been organized in Galesburg, Illinois, and consisted exclusively of Swedes, volunteered their services. Because of the overwhelming response of volunteers, this company was not called into service. However, a second call occurred when Congress authorized 300,000 volunteers for three years service. The Galesburg Company was reformed. However, many of the original members had joined other units. At muster the new company consisted of 97 Swedes and two Germans.¹⁰

Andrew Engstrom enlisted in this company on September 1, 1861. The original enlistment document is not part of the record. The company descriptive book is unclear as to where he enlisted. Civil War records are often incomplete or contradictory. Andrew is shown as enlisting at Bishop Hill/Wataga, Illinois. The

44. Anders	26	26. Bond Per Jönsson	Sold. Eric Lindström och
		hans hustru Carin Andersdotter 30	hans hustru Nilsdotter i Grängsbo,
		dotter S. M. J. i	Drängar Eric Jönsson och
		Hälsing	Pigan Carin Andersdotter
			här i 44. S i Viken

Anders's birth records from 1842 May 26 in Alfta, Hälsingland, Sweden.

correct information appears to be that his residence was Bishop Hill and that he enlisted in Wataga. However, because of this confusing document, his residence is listed incorrectly in the Illinois Adjutant General's Report as Wataga, Illinois. The company descriptive book further indicates that Andrew was nineteen years old, 5'7" inches in height, was a farmer, had a "flattered" complexion, dark hair, and dark eyes.¹¹

Andrew is appointed as a musician (drummer) and is mustered in at Camp Butler in Springfield, Illinois, on September 5, 1861. The company was designated as Company C of the 43rd Illinois Infantry. The 43rd Illinois was, with the exception of Company C, primarily composed of and commanded by German-Americans. Company C was designated the flag company for the regiment.¹²



A Union infantry drum.

A Swedish drummer boy goes to war

On October 13th the regiment was ordered to St. Louis where they were given old Austrian muskets. Prior to being sent to Otterville, Missouri, they were issued old Harpers Ferry and English Tower muskets. These weapons had been altered from flintlock to percussion guns. This was an improvement, but still substandard for the era. The regiment arrived at Otterville on November 4th and remained there until they were ordered back to St. Louis on January 20, 1862. After their arrival in St. Louis, they were issued .54 caliber Belgian rifles. This was an excellent weapon and served them well at the

Battle of Shiloh.¹³

On February 6th the 43rd Illinois was ordered to join General Grant's expedition against Fort Henry and Fort Donelson in Tennessee. Fort Henry surrendered after being attacked by naval gunboats before Grant's army came into play. Grant moved on to attack Fort Donelson, but the 43rd Illinois remained at Fort Henry to guard the transports and supplies. This assignment did not sit well with the boys of Company C: "This proved a great disappointment to many of the Swedish boys who had an apprehension that the war would be over in a short time and they would have to return home without having taken part in any real battle."¹³ Unfortunately, this was a needless concern. Company C and Andrew Engstrom were about to be caught in the maelstrom of one of the most horrific battles fought in the American Civil War.

Bloody Shiloh

On April 6, 1862, Company C was encamped near Pittsburg Landing, Tennessee, and a short distance from a small church named Shiloh. The 43rd Illinois was assigned to the 3rd Brigade of General McClelland's Division of General Grant's Army of the Tennessee. The regiment had been there for three weeks and every morning for the last week the Colonel of the regiment had roused his men early. Apparently they made so much noise that there had been frequent complaints to General McClelland from other units.¹⁴ The regiment's early rising was fortuitous on this day. As the soldiers of Company C were awaiting orders to form ranks that morning, volleys of musketry fire were heard coming from the picket line. Confederate General Johnston and his 44,000 soldiers of the Army of Mississippi had started a surprise attack.

The 43rd Illinois was one of the few regiments that was prepared to meet the enemy. Parenthetically, Andrew's obituary claimed that he was the first drummer to beat the long roll (call to arms) that day.¹⁵ Quickly many

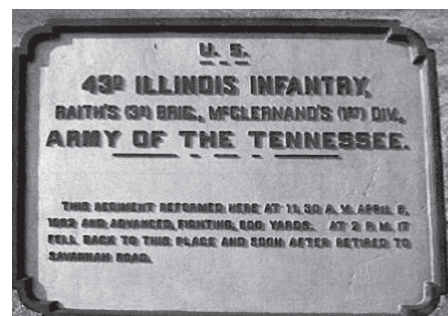
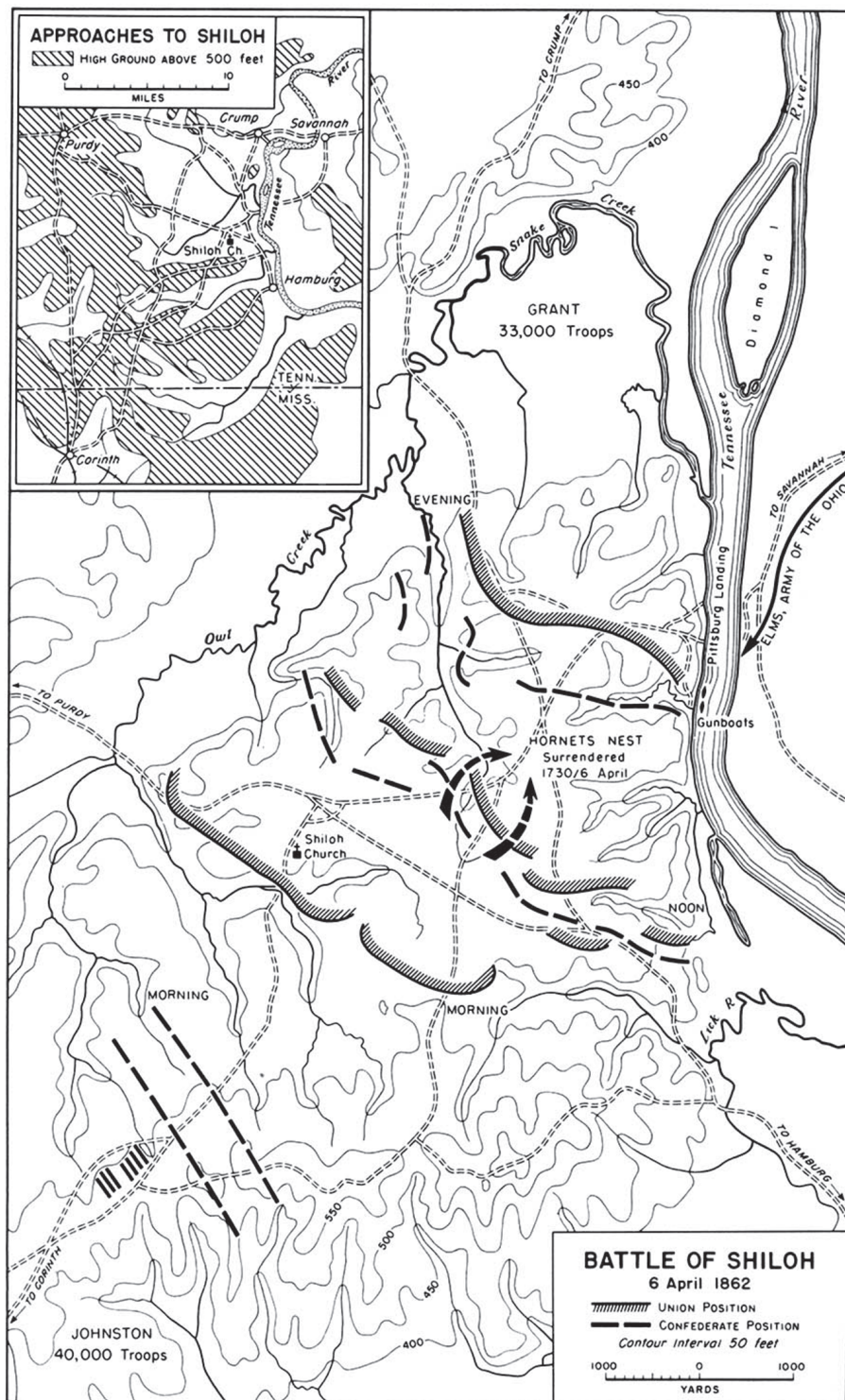
Union regiments collapsed under the Rebel attack. The 49th Illinois Regiment, which was on the 43rd Illinois's immediate left, panicked and fled the field. Company C as part of the 2nd Battalion of the 43rd Illinois was ordered to fill the gap. For approximately ten minutes the 2nd Battalion stood their ground although heavily outnumbered.

Eventually the Confederate onslaught forced them to fall back upon the rest of the regiment. At this point, one of boys of Company C had been killed and three others were severely wounded. The 43rd Illinois held its position for a time, but soon it was forced back when flanked by Confederate forces. It reformed approximately one thousand feet from its original position leaving 36 dead soldiers behind.

The 43rd Illinois held this position repulsing several determined assaults until it and two other regiments were the only Union units remaining on this part of the battlefield. The enemy was on their flanks and in their rear.¹⁶ Another Swedish boy of Company C had lost his life and others had been severely wounded. The 43rd Illinois retreated by a circuitous route of about one mile and was able to unite with other Union forces. From this position they repulsed three other frenzied charges and stood firm until nightfall.¹⁷

On the second day of the battle the situation reversed. Significant Union reinforcements had arrived and the Confederates were driven from the battlefield. The 43rd Illinois saw combat on the second day, but not of the same intensity. On the third day the Confederates retreated to Corinth, Mississippi. The Battle of Shiloh resulted in 13,047 Union soldiers being killed, wounded, or captured. The Confederate forces suffered 10,699 casualties.¹⁸

These losses were stunning considering that the losses from America's three previous wars – the Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Mexican War totaled only 23,741.¹⁹ The 43rd Illinois had seen 49 of its soldiers killed and 157 wounded in the bloody fighting at Shiloh. Three Swedes of



The Shiloh monument of the Illinois 43rd regiment.

medical treatment took their toll on the average soldier. In addition, Union soldiers – and in particular Swedish-born soldiers – were unused to the southern climate. Quite often they would be encamped near or be required to slog through malarial bottom land or swamps.

Prior to Shiloh, six Swedes of Company C had died and one had been discharged for disability unrelated to combat. Before the end of 1862 another eleven soldiers were discharged for disability and five more had died. Additionally, another eight were discharged for the wounds that they had received in combat. Of the 99 soldiers that began with Company C, 15 were dead and 20 others had been discharged for wounds, illness, or injuries.²¹

A turning point in the war – siege of Vicksburg

The 43rd Illinois participated in the Siege of Corinth, Mississippi, which resulted in the capture of that city on May 30th, 1862. The 43rd Illinois spent the next year in southern Tennessee and northern Mississippi. The regiment was sent on frequent expeditions to counter Confederate troop movements or intercept Rebel raiders. In one particular brisk action the 43rd Illinois engaged the forces of the famous Confederate cavalry general, Nathan Bedford Forrest. It occurred in mid-December near Jackson, Tennessee. The 43rd Illinois was part of a force that had been sent to intercept Forrest who had been conducting one of his spectacular raids behind Union lines. Although unsuccessful in stopping Forrest's raid, the 43rd Illinois and 61st Illinois repulsed a

Company C had been killed and fourteen had been severely wounded. The Captain of Company C, Olof Edvall, had received a mortal wound on the second day. He died a month later.²⁰ Fortunately, Andrew Engstrom survived the bloodbath of Shiloh apparently unscathed.

Illness, injury, and death

The sad fact of life in the Union army was that far more men died from illness or accidents than due to combat. This was also true for Company C. Almost constant exposure to the elements, frequent marches in inclement weather, improper nutrition, poor sanitation, and 19th century



The Union troops enter Vicksburg on 1863 July 4. (Picture from National Geographic, vol. 124/1, July 1963).

cavalry charge by Forrest's troopers, inflicting heavy casualties on the Rebels and only suffering two wounded men.

On May 1, 1863, the regimental records indicate that Andrew Engstrom was relieved of his previous duty as a drummer and became a regular private. For the remainder of the war Andrew would carry a musket.

Also in May 1863, the 43rd Illinois Regiment became part of the Vicksburg Campaign. They boarded a steamboat and traveled up the Yazoo River to challenge a small Confederate force, commanded by General Wirt Adams, which was threatening General Grant's supply line necessary to maintain the siege at Vicksburg. After landing near Satartia, Mississippi, the 43rd Illinois and other units drove the Confederates from the area, effectively ending the threat. Until Vicksburg fell, the 43rd Illinois was encamped at Haines Bluff protecting the supply line.²²

Across the Mississippi

After the surrender of Vicksburg, the 43rd Illinois was transported to Helena, Arkansas, to be part of an expedition to capture Little Rock, Arkansas. The Union forces under general Steele forced the Confederates to flee Little Rock on September 1, 1863. Although the first unit to enter Little Rock was a cavalry regiment, the 43rd Illinois was allegedly the first infantry regiment to enter the city upon its capture.

It is interesting to note that the well-known Swedish-American Colonel Hans Mattson, commanding the 3rd Minnesota Infantry Regiment, also made that claim for his regiment.²³ The 43rd Illinois was detailed to serve as provost guard in Little Rock. The provost guard served as the army's police force, (although this seems a curious assignment for a regiment consisting primarily of native speaking German and Swedish soldiers). It appears that they

performed this function until perhaps as late as the beginning of 1864.

By the end of 1863, three additional men were mustered into Company C, all Swedes, but this did not compensate for the additional losses. Another five Swedes had been discharged for disabilities, two others had been reassigned to the Invalid Corps, and another four had died.²⁴

Andrew reenlists

Due to the considerable losses the 43rd Illinois had incurred, the regiment was reorganized in September 1864. Companies A, B, and C were consolidated into a new Company A. This new company was officered by the Swedish officers from Company C and the majority of soldiers in this new company were the Swedish boys from Company C.

In November of 1863 there were nine months remaining of the three-year enlistment. The boys in the new Company A were offered a thirty day furlough and transportation back home if they reenlisted. Additionally, they would receive a \$400 bounty, paid when they were mustered out, if they reenlisted. Most of the surviving members of the old Company C reenlisted. Andrew reenlisted on November 18th, 1863, for another three years. An actual copy of his reenlistment is extant. This document indicates that Andrew was born in "Helsingland," Sweden, that he was twenty-one years old, and a farmer. Of special interest is that Andrew did not sign his name, but "made his mark" which served as a signature.²⁵ It is unknown whether Andrew's motive for reenlistment was patriotism, camaraderie, or the money.

The furlough began in February 1864. While back in Illinois, Company A gained 30 new recruits all of which were Swedes.

To be continued.

Notes:

¹ Kvist, Roger. "The Swedish Union Guards of Bishop Hill During the Civil War," *Swedish American Genealogist (SAG)*, Vol. XVI, No. 3, September 1996.

- ² Kvist, Roger. "The Galesburg Light Guards During the Civil War," *SAG*, Vol. XVII, No. 2, June 1997.
- ³ Kvist, Roger. "A Social History of the Swedish Ethnic Units from Illinois in the Civil War," *The Swedish-American Historical Quarterly*, Vol. L, No. 1, January 1999.
- ⁴ Olson, Schön, and Engberg. *History of the Swedes in Illinois*, Chicago 1908.
- ⁵ Alfta Parish, Gävleborg län, *Födelslängd* (Birth records).
- ⁶ Alfta Parish, Gävleborg län, *Husförhörslängd* (Cl. survey AI:15a:228).
- ⁷ Unknown Kansas newspaper, 1915.
- ⁸ Bishop Hill Colony Church Membership Book.
- ⁹ Hokanson, Nels "Swedish Immigrants in Lincoln's Time," 1942.
- ¹⁰ Kvist. "The Galesburg Light Guards During the Civil War."
- ¹¹ Andrew Engstrom's Compiled Military Service Record, National Archives and Records Administration.
- ¹² Olson, Schön, and Engberg.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Hicken, Victor. *Illinois in the Civil War*, Urbana, 1966.
- ¹⁶ Unknown Nebraska newspaper, 1915.
- ¹⁷ Sword, Wiley. *Shiloh: Bloody April*, New York, 2001.
- ¹⁸ Olson, Schön, and Engberg.
- ¹⁹ Sword.
- ²⁰ Foote, Shelby. *The Civil War; a Narrative*, New York, 1963.
- ²¹ Olson, Schön, and Engberg.
- ²² *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois Containing Reports for the Years 1861 – 1866*, Springfield, 1901.
- ²³ Bearss, Edwin. *The Campaign For Vicksburg*, Dayton, 1986.
- ²⁴ Olson, Schön, and Engberg.
- ²⁵ *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois Containing Reports for the Years 1861–1866*, Springfield, 1901.

The author:
Paul D. Sword
E-mail <wikblom@yahoo.com>

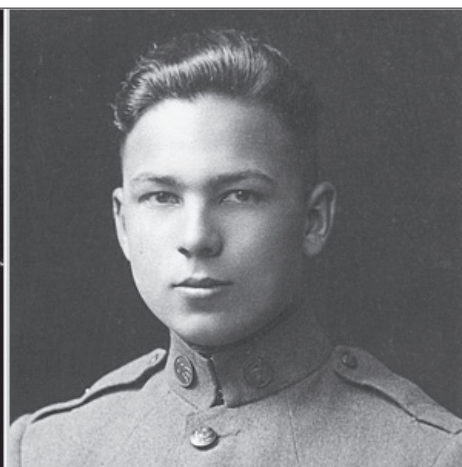
The oldest U.S. veteran of the WWI has passed away

Frank Buckles, who drove an Army ambulance in France in 1918 and came to symbolize a generation of embattled young Americans as the last of the World War I doughboys, died on Sunday 27 Feb. 2011 at his home in Charles Town, W. Va. He was 110.

His death was announced by a family spokesman, David DeJonge, The Associated Press said.

He was only a corporal and he never got closer than 30 or so miles from the Western Front trenches, but Mr. Buckles became something of a national treasure as the last living link to the two million men who joined the American Expeditionary Forces in France in "the war to end all wars." Frank Woodruff Buckles was born Feb. 1, 1901, on a farm near Bethany, Mo. He was living in Oakwood, Okla., when America entered World War I and he tried to enlist in the Marine Corps at age 16, having been inspired by recruiting posters.

The Marines turned him down as underage and under the required weight. The Navy didn't want him either, saying he had flat feet. But the Army took him in August 1917 after he had lied about his age, and he volunteered to be an ambulance driv-



er, hearing that that was the quickest path to service in France.

He traveled widely over the years, working for steamship companies, and he was on business in Manila when the Japanese occupied it following the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. He was imprisoned by the Japanese, losing more than 50 pounds, before being liberated by an American airborne unit in February 1945.

After retiring from steamship work in the mid-1950s, Mr. Buckles ran a cattle farm in Charles Town, and he was still riding a tractor there at age 104.

The last known of the nearly 5 million American veterans of World War I, Frank Buckles, was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery.

According to media there are now only two veterans from the "Great War" still alive.

They are the seaman *Claude Choules*, born in Britain, and now living in Australia, where he is the oldest living man. The other survivor is British *Florence Green (née Patterson)* who joined the Women's Royal Air Force in September 1918 at the age of 17,[2][3] where she served as an Officer's Mess Steward [waitress].

Both survivors were born in 1901.