

From Hälsingland to Bloody Shiloh and beyond

A Swedish-American farm boy in the American Civil War. Part 2

BY PAUL SWARD

The Disastrous Red River Campaign

The Red River Campaign is a little known Union defeat that is best described as a fiasco. The object of the campaign was to capture Shreveport, Louisiana, and gain control of the Red River which would lead to the capture of east Texas. The plan called for Union General Banks to lead an army up the Red River, accompanied by the Union Navy. General Steele would march south from Little Rock and both forces would converge on Shreveport. However, it didn't quite work out that way. Banks was defeated by a much smaller Confederate force in two separate battles and retreated back down the Red River. General Steele's force had an even more difficult time.¹



Major General Frederick Steele (1819–1868).

The 43rd Illinois departed Little Rock on March 23rd as part of General Steele's forces. From the very beginning things did not portend well. The Arkansas countryside that they marched through was sparsely populated with rugged hills alternating with pine barrens and swamps. It was described as a howling wilderness.² What few roads there were became quagmires with a small amount of rain. Because of his concern about supplying his troops, Steele immediately put his men on half rations.

On April 2nd the 43rd Illinois skirmished with Confederate cavalry at Okolona, Arkansas. From now on, Steele's column was under continual harassment by Confederate cavalry. On April 10th, as part of the battle of Prairie d' Ane, the 43rd Illinois and 40th Iowa, supported by artillery, attacked a Confederate fortified position and drove them from the field. While on the march to Camden, Arkansas, April 12th through the 14th, the 43rd Illinois was involved in several skirmishes with Confederate troops.

Confederate harassment drove Steele to entrench his troops at Camden. He was now desperately short of supplies and his men were half-starved. Steele sent out a large wagon train to forage the countryside. Confederate forces destroyed this wagon train. Over 400 men and 198 wagons were lost. Another wagon train bringing supplies from Pine Bluffs did get through to Steele's position. However, on April 18th during the return trip to Pine Bluffs, this

wagon train was also attacked by the Confederates who defeated and captured the three regiments of Union troops guarding the wagon train. Over 1,300 men were lost.³

Retreat

General Steele was now in an untenable position. He still had inadequate supplies and no way of obtaining any. After dark on April 26th the 43rd Illinois, along with all Steele's troops, quietly abandoned Camden and began the long retreat back to Little Rock. The 43rd Illinois had the unenviable position of being part of the rear guard of the army. On April 29th the 43rd Illinois repulsed three separate advances by the Confederates. On April 30th the Confederates attacked in force while Steele was crossing his forces at the Saline River which became known as the Battle of Jenkin's Ferry. The 43rd Illinois, as part of the rear guard, was in the thick of it. Fortunately, the Union forces had a strong defensive position and the Confederate attack was disjointed. The Confederates were repulsed with heavy losses.

Parenthetically, there is a family story in which Andrew witnessed a Union artillery unit targeting a Confederate officer.⁴ Allegedly, this targeting resulted in the decapitation of the officer. If this story is not apocryphal, it is possible that it occurred at Jenkin's Ferry, since the 43rd Illinois was brigaded with an artillery unit and fought a defensive battle. However, it could also have occurred on many other occasions.

In the aftermath of this battle the

Union forces continued their retreat. The retreat was ignominious. The half-starved Union troops left much of their equipment strewn behind them as they struggled to gain the safety of the Little Rock fortifications which they finally reached on May 3rd.

Amazingly, it appears that not one of the Swedish boys was killed or wounded during the Red River Campaign. Although it is clear that they were forced to endure great hardship during this expedition.

Detailed to the Pioneer Corps and the End of the War

For the remainder of the war the 43rd Illinois and Andrew Engstrom were garrisoned at Little Rock. On July 1, 1864, Andrew was detailed to the Pioneer Corps.

The Pioneer Corps was essentially an engineering unit. It was utilized by the army to build roads, bridges, and fortifications. Although Andrew never fought again in a pitched battle, he and the other Swedish soldiers faced constant danger. Arkansas was a center of guerilla activity. Acts of sabotage and am-

bushes were routinely conducted by Rebel guerillas. However, there is no record indicating that any of the Swedes became casualties resulting from Rebel guerilla activity.

On March 7, 1865, Andrew returned to Company A of the 43rd Illinois where he remained until he was mustered out of the army. After the war was over the regiment remained on duty at Little Rock. Andrew was admitted into the Little Rock General Hospital, which was located at St. John's College, on August 12, 1865. He had previously been in the regimental hospital. Andrew's pension application indicates that he had become sick in July. The records indicate he was admitted for "remit fever." On September 20th he was returned to duty.⁵

On November 30, 1865, Andrew and all the remaining Swedes in Company A were mustered out of the service at Little Rock. They were transported to Springfield, Illinois. There they received their final pay on December 14th and returned home. Of the original 99 men in the Galesburg Light Guards, one had deserted, 26 were discharged for disability, and 20 had died.⁶

Aftermath of the War

In the 1870 Illinois federal census, Andrew and his brother Peter, who had also served in the war with the 148th Illinois Regiment, were again residing with their parents in Henry County, Illinois.

In Andrew's military pension records it indicates that he married Christina Lenstrom (also shown as Lendstrom) the same year. Andrew's pension records reflect that he moved to Republic County, Kansas, in 1879. The 1880 Kansas federal census has Andrew and Christina with two children residing and farming in Republic County. The pension records reveal that Andrew subsequently lived in various locations in Kansas as well as Nance County, Nebraska. In the 1910 Nebraska federal census, Andrew is a resident at the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home in Hall County, Nebraska.

Andrew's pension was based on the illness he was hospitalized for in 1865 at Little Rock. According to his declaration he was hospitalized for three months. He had originally contracted cholera which was followed by typhoid fever. Andrew further claimed that although he had recovered from these diseases, his lungs had been permanently damaged which left him unable to perform manual labor without great difficulty. There were affidavits filed on behalf of Andrew supporting his claim.⁷ However, it should be noted that a significant number of Civil War veterans applied for a disability pensions and not all were valid.

Piecing together the remainder of Andrew's life has been difficult. I was unable to locate any of his direct descendants. Perhaps this article will cause one to come forward.

However, I was able to locate descendants of his brother Olof, who had knowledge of Andrew. At some point Andrew became estranged from his wife. At the time of his death he was residing by himself in Genoa, Nebraska. His wife, as well as his three adult children, were living in Kansas.⁸

Edwin Engstrom, a descendant of Olof, related that Andrew had become an alcoholic and led a dysfunctional life. Andrew, who had been living near his brother Olof in Nebraska, had become a concern for the family. Consequently, they placed him in a Soldiers' and Sailors' Home. Unfortunately, Andrew did not like it there and returned to Genoa, Nebraska.

It was there that he died on January 27, 1915, resulting from a fire which his obituary opined was caused by Andrew's pipe igniting his bedclothes.⁹

The end


Andrew, a Swedish immigrant farm boy, had left his home in 1861 to fight for his adopted homeland. During the four years that he served in the army he had endured horrendous combat as well as almost constant exposure to the elements and disease. At the

Hospital Number <i>IX 2232</i>	
Name	<i>Andrew Engstrom</i>
Age	<i>23</i> Nationality <i>Swedish</i>
Married or Single	<i>Single</i>
Residence	<i>Bishop Hill Henry Co Ill</i>
Post Office address of wife or nearest relative.	<i>do</i>
Rank	<i>P. Co. A Regiment 43rd Ill</i>
When admitted	<i>Aug 12 1865</i>
From what source	<i>Regimental Hospital</i>
Diagnosis: (<i>In surgical cases, state explicitly seat and character of wound or injury.</i>)	
<i>Remitt fever</i>	
General Hospital General Hospital	
In what occasion	<i>Little Rock, Ark.</i>
Date	
Nature of missile or weapon	

Andrew's hospital record.

Mustered into the Service of the United States in Co. "C" 43rd Reg. Inf. July 1862
 on the 28th day of December 1863 at Little Rock, Ark.
 1st Lt. Andrew Engstrom
 1st Lt. August 3rd 1864
 1st Lt. August 3rd 1864
 1st Lt. August 3rd 1864

VOLUNTEER ENLISTMENT.



State of *Illinois* Co. of *Henry* Town of *Bishopshill*
 I, *Andrew Engstrom*..... born in *Sweden*.....
 in the State of *Sweden*....., aged *Twenty one* years, and by occupation
 a *Farmer*..... Do HEREBY acknowledge to have volunteered this
18th day of *November*....., 186*2*, to serve as a **Soldier**
 in the **ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**, for the period of **THREE**
YEARS, unless sooner discharged by proper authority: Do also agree to accept such bounty,
 pay, rations and clothing, as are, or may be, established by law for Volunteers. And
 I, *Andrew Engstrom*....., do solemnly swear, that I will bear true faith and allegi-
 ance to the **United States of America**, and that I will serve them honestly and faithfully
 against all their enemies or opposers whomsoever; and that I will observe and obey the orders of
 the President of the United States, and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according
 to the Rules and Articles of War.

Sworn and subscribed to, at *Little Rock, Ark.*
 this *18th* day of *November* 186*2*,
 Before *J. E. Carter, Lt. Col. G. 43rd Reg. Inf.* *his Engstrom*

I CERTIFY, ON HONOR, That I have carefully examined the above named Volunteer, agreeably to the General Regulations of
 the Army, and that in my opinion he is free from all bodily defects and mental infirmity, which would, in any way, disqualify him
 from performing the duties of a soldier.
S. M. Stackhoff, Surgeon U.S. Army
 EXAMINING SURGEON.

I CERTIFY, ON HONOR, That I have minutely inspected the Volunteer *Andrew Engstrom* previously to his
 enlistment, and that he was entirely sober when enlisted; that, to the best of my judgment and belief, he is of lawful age; and
 that, in accepting him as duly qualified to perform the duties of an able-bodied soldier, I have strictly observed the Regulations
 which govern the recruiting service. This soldier has *Dark* eyes, *Dark* hair, *Fair* complexion, is *5*
 feet *4* inches high.

43 Regiment of *Illinois* Volunteers,
J. E. Carter, Lt. Col. G. RECRUITING OFFICER.



Andrew's sons at
 their father's
 gravesite in
 October 1924.
 (Paul D. Sward
 collection)

end of his service he contracted two
 of these diseases which appear to
 have had an adverse effect on his life.
 Did the war destroy his health? Did
 he become a dysfunctional alcoholic
 due to what is now called posttrauma-
 tic stress disorder? Perhaps his life
 was not shaped by his war experi-
 ences, but it seems unlikely. What we
 do know is that Andrew's sacrifices,
 along with the sacrifices of thousands
 of other young Swedes, helped to pre-
 serve the Union and end slavery in
 America.

Notes:

- ¹ Foote, Shelby, *The Civil War; a Narrative*, New York, 1963.
- ² Joiner, Gary, *Through the Howling Wilderness; The 1864 Red River Campaign and Union Failure in the West*, Knoxville, 2006.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Interview of Edwin Engstrom, 2010.
- ⁵ Andrew Engstrom's Compiled Military Service Record, National Archives and Records Administration.
- ⁶ *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois Containing Reports for the Years 1861 - 1866*, Springfield, 1901.
- ⁷ Andrew Engstrom's Compiled Military Pension Record, National Archives and Records Administration.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Unknown Nebraska newspaper, 1915.



Headstone for Andrew Engstrom in Valley
 View Cemetery, Genoa, NE. (Findagrave)

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