

#### **IBC#4 Patriotic Instruction – Union Veterans Lead the Way - May 2018 – Brother Ross Schwalm**

Primary Reference – *A Centennial History of Tower City and Porter Township Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania 1868 – 1968*, published by the Centennial Committee in 1968

My home town of Tower City, PA was organized as a borough in 1868. It was carved out of Porter Township, PA from several villages that ran along the side of the Big Lick Mountain as well as another two villages that were located on the valley floor. The township was in the western part of Schuylkill County and the Union Provost Marshall, Captain Charlemagne Tower, was a successful recruiter as over half the men of age joined up in support of the Union cause. Tower realized the value in the land due to coal deposits as early as 1846.<sup>i</sup> He started buying land on the behalf of the railroad companies who needed coal as well as coal to sell to the growing city of Philadelphia. My Great Grandfather Peter Schwalm bought land in Porter Township as early as 1860. This was a long trek over Big Lick Mountain from the Hegins Valley, but he was determined to strike out on his own as his many brothers had most of the farm land of the Schwalm family.

The Civil War put a bit of a halt to development in Porter Township. Peter Schwalm ended up helping the wife of his older brother, Samuel Schwalm, who had enlisted into the 50<sup>th</sup> PA Infantry. But by 1863, Peter had a falling out with Samuel's wife and moved to Porter Township to clear his land and start farming. I have found Peter's tax records from 1863 and 1864 which proved he was becoming successful with his farming as well as a mill that he ran to support other farmers.

As the war ended, veterans returned to Porter Township. More than 100 veterans settled in Porter Township to help continue the progress started before the war.<sup>ii</sup> A GAR post was established and named after one of my relatives, William Wallace Thompson of the 96<sup>th</sup> PA Infantry, who died of disease in December 1862 after caring for wounded soldiers from the Battle of Antietam. He was buried at Antietam Cemetery. My Great Grandfather John Lebo, 210<sup>th</sup> PA Infantry, settled in Porter Township and bought a hotel to service the railroad and mining businessmen who visited the area. My Great Grandfather John P. Kessler, 48<sup>th</sup> PA Infantry, moved to town to work as a teamster in the mines. My Thompson relatives, Second Great Uncle David Thompson, 96<sup>th</sup> PA Infantry and 39<sup>th</sup> PA Militia (1863) along with his younger brother and my Great Grandfather, William Wallace Thompson, also of the 39<sup>th</sup> PA Militia, started a brick yard and carpentry business for the new construction required to support a growing community. Other veterans helped start schools, run other businesses and were the leaders who organized the Memorial Day parade every year. These Civil War veterans led the way.

This township grew in population and descendants of these Civil War veterans sent men and women to the Spanish American War, World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam<sup>iii</sup> and Desert Storm<sup>iv</sup>. It was my honor as a teenager to participate in many Memorial Day ceremonies organized by the American Legion Post 468 in Tower City. In 1986, as a Marine Corps Captain, I was drafted by the Adjutant of the Legion, my brother Ben Schwalm, US Army Vietnam Era, to give the Memorial Day Keynote Speech. And as my home town celebrates its 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in June 2018, I will be in the lead vehicle of the veterans' division with my Vietnam US Navy Seabee cousin, George Tallman. Veterans are still leading the way in my home town.

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<sup>i</sup> Page 7

<sup>ii</sup> Page 74

<sup>iii</sup> Pages 75 - 87

<sup>iv</sup> A monument honoring the 131<sup>st</sup> Transportation Company which included many soldiers from Porter Township was dedicated in honor of this unit's service in Desert Shield/Desert Storm.