

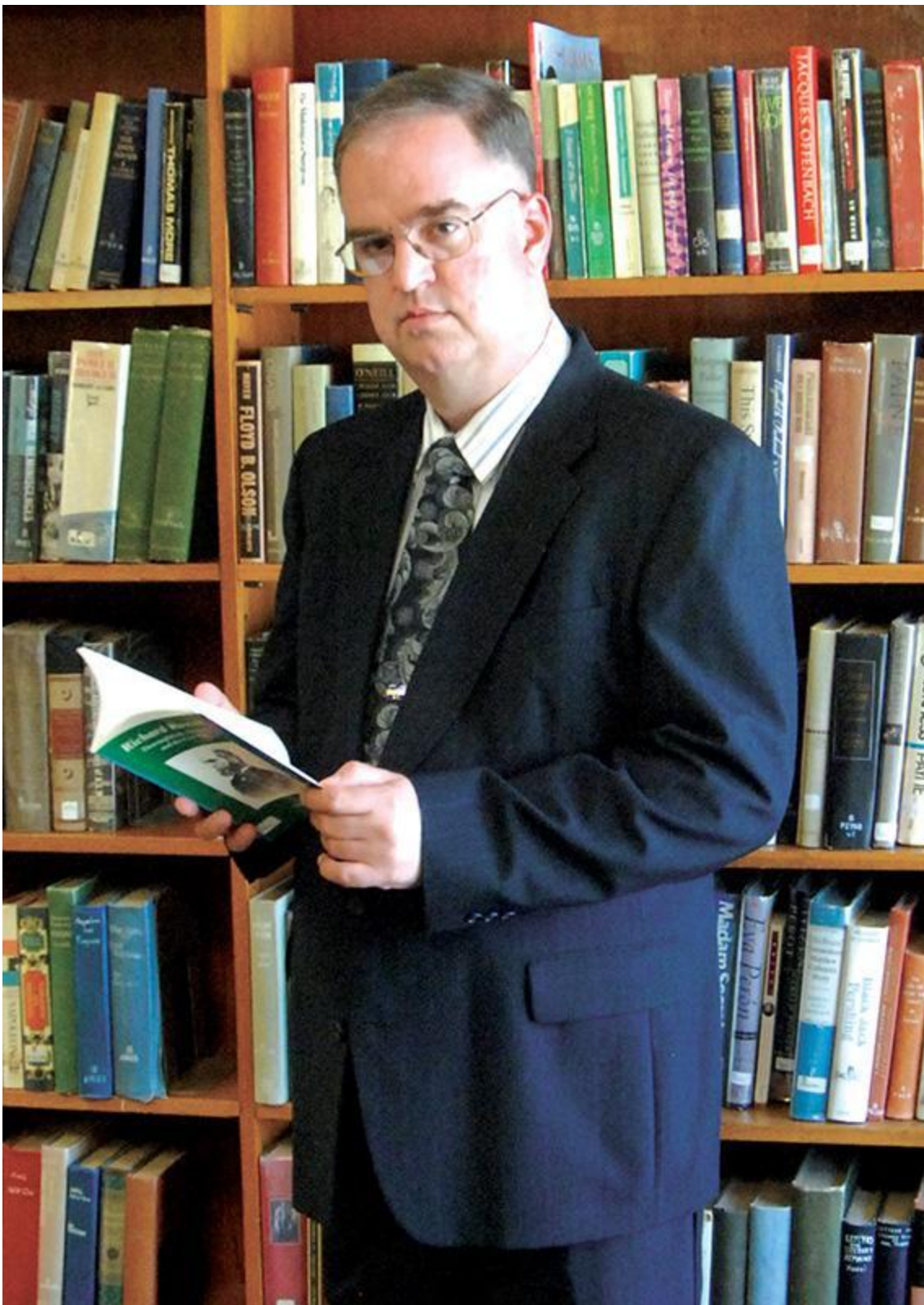


Illinois Has Been Well-Represented In American Wars

by Tom Emery
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ILLINOIS HAS BEEN WELL-REPRESENTED IN AMERICAN WARS

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Since statehood, and even before, Illinois has been well-represented in American wars. In many cases, Illinois was among national leaders in the number of men and women supplied to the service.

Today, statues, monuments, and memorials stand silently in cities and towns across the state, honoring the hundreds of thousands of Illinoisans who fought for their country in various conflicts over the last 200 years.

Though Illinois did not attain statehood until 1818, there were a surprising number of skirmishes across the state in the War of 1812. The Military Tract, an expanse of land in western Illinois between the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers, was settled by War of 1812 veterans, who received parcels of land as compensation for their service.

Prior to that, a few Revolutionary War veterans settled in Illinois in its territorial days and now rest in scattered cemeteries across the state.

An estimated 6,123 Illinois men fought in the Mexican-American War of 1846-48, and several Illinois villages and municipalities are named for landmarks in that war. John J. Hardin, a Jacksonville congressman and rival to Abraham Lincoln, lost his life at the battle of Buena Vista in 1847.

During the Civil War, Illinois sent over 259,000 men to the Union cause, trailing only New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. The state lost over 34,800, behind only New York and Ohio.

Illinois also supplied 53 full generals to the North, including some of the war's greatest names, such as Ulysses S. Grant, John A. Logan, John M. Palmer, John Buford, and Benjamin Grierson. Illinois men fought, and died, at nearly every major battle in the western theater, while a few also served in the East.

Historians at Gettysburg National Military Park agree that the first shot in the battle on July 1, 1863, was fired by a member of the 8th Illinois Cavalry. Many also believe that the first to fall at Gettysburg was a man of the 12th Illinois Cavalry.

A total of 106 Illinois soldiers earned the Medal of Honor in the Civil War. Some Illinoisans, including Grierson, continued serving their country on the frontier in the post-Civil War era. In 1898, an estimated 11,000 Illinoisans were on duty during the Spanish-American War.

During World War I, Illinois actually supplied more men to the cause than in the Civil War, in a much shorter time. Some 314,504 Illinois men served in the conflict, in which America participated for just over a year.

The number of total enlistments trailed only New York and Pennsylvania. One of every twelve men in the Army was an Illinoisan. The state ranked second in the number of men who earned the Medal of Honor and produced five flying aces.

During World War II, some 958,000 men and 14,000 women served from Illinois, with two-thirds coming from the draft and the rest from enlistment. A reported 22,192 Illinois soldiers and sailors were killed, with another 159 listed as missing in action.

In the weeks that followed Pearl Harbor, the state established 361 local draft boards – 180 in Cook County and the rest elsewhere – to handle the influx of recruits. As in the First World War, the state also converted countless facilities from civilian to military use, most notably for training installations.

As before, men from Illinois served in all branches, and one recalls the teamwork of the men on the ground, in the air, and on the water.

“Some people talk about rivalries between the various branches of service, but I never really saw that,” said James Lambeth, 97, a retired farmer from Plainview, Ill. who survived being hit with five pieces of shrapnel from an artillery shell on D-Day. “I thought the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines all worked together really well. As the old saying goes, we were all on the same team.”

The Korean War of 1950-53 is considered a “forgotten war” by many today, but over 1,700 Illinois troops lost their lives in that conflict. As of 2000, Illinois was still home to over 155,000 Korean War veterans, the seventh-highest total in the nation.

Over a decade later, some 2,970 Illinois troops never came home from Vietnam, and many Vietnam veterans in Illinois still carry the scars, both physical and emotional.

More recently, Illinois was well-represented in the Kuwait-Iraq conflicts of the early 1990s. Since the terror attacks of 2001, over 25,600 Illinois troops have been sent to Iraq and Afghanistan, including 20,000 from the Illinois National Guard.

In addition to countless local memorials, Illinois troops are commemorated at the Illinois Vietnam Veterans Memorial, dedicated in 1988, and the Illinois Korean War Memorial, dedicated in 1996. Both are located at Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield.

Tom Emery is a freelance writer and historical researcher from Carlinville, Ill. He may be reached at 217-710-8392 or ilcivilwar@yahoo.com.

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