

The Bugle



**Quarterly Journal of the
Camp Curtin Historical Society
and Civil War Round Table, Inc.**

**Summer 2007
Volume 17, Number 2**



Brig. Gen. Joseph F. Knipe

Joseph Knipe – Hometown Hero

Joseph Farmer Knipe was born on March 30, 1823, in Mount Joy, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The son of a blacksmith, he was apprenticed to a cobbler in Philadelphia to learn a trade. Knipe apparently had a restless soul and gave up shoemaking to join the United States Army in 1842. Assigned to the 2nd Artillery Regiment, he rose to the rank of sergeant and served in the Mexican War. Discharged in 1847, he moved to Harrisburg and took a job with the Pennsylvania Railroad. He joined the state militia and when his friend Edward Williams was appointed a brigadier general, Knipe was promoted to major and made an aide-de-camp on the brigade staff. This put Knipe in a prominent position in a prime geographic location as the Civil War approached.

With the firing on Fort Sumter and Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers for ninety days, patriotic men began to flock to Harrisburg to offer their services. Unfortunately, the Commonwealth was not prepared to receive them or turn them into soldiers. Governor Curtin met with General Williams and Major Knipe and instructed them to select a location in the Harrisburg area for a camp of rendezvous and instruction to handle the influx of volunteers.

As local residents, Williams and Knipe were familiar with the Dauphin County Agricultural Fairgrounds. Located about one mile north of the Capitol Building in what was then the middle of farmland, the fairgrounds offered several advantageous conditions for a military camp. It was a relatively flat area, good for laying out a tent city, there was a good water supply, the Pennsylvania Canal and Railroad were just east of the site to provide transportation, and there was an exhibit building that could be used for a headquarters. It was decided that this would become "Camp Union" and usher Pennsylvania's volunteers off to war.

On Thursday, April 18, 1861, Williams and Knipe went out to the fairgrounds and were followed by a crowd of would-be soldiers and curious citizens. Teresa Knipe, Joseph's daughter, recalled that her father climbed to the roof of Floral Hall with a large American Flag. In a stroke of genius, or perhaps hoping to curry political favor, Knipe shouted, "What shall we name the camp? I propose the name of Governor Curtin!" A cheer went up from the assembled crowd, Knipe raised the stars and stripes, and Camp Curtin was born.



Camp Curtin in Harper's Weekly, April 1861

Quickly, Knipe and the other militia officers began organizing the camp. Streets of tepee-shaped Sibley Tents were laid out, men were logged in on huge muster rolls and assigned to units, supplies were distributed, and rudimentary training begun (above). Knipe, of course, wanted to see action and had no intention of being a staff officer stuck in a training camp filling out forms and watching other men march off to adventure and glory.

After the disastrous rout of the Federal Army at First Bull Run/Manassas, Congress authorized Lincoln to call for three-year volunteers. In September 1861, Knipe was commissioned colonel by Gov. Curtin and authorized to raise a regiment that would become the 46th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry. Men from the counties of Allegheny, Berks, Dauphin, Luzerne, Mifflin, Northampton, Northumber-

land, and Potter came together at Camp Curtin and were assigned to Knipe's new regiment. With little training, the regiment left Harrisburg on September 17 for the Harpers Ferry area.

In the spring of 1862, Knipe's men would serve in General Bank's army opposing the great Confederate General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley. Knipe was wounded at the Battle of Winchester in May. Later the regiment was assigned to General Pope's army and Knipe would again be wounded at Cedar Mountain in August.



At Antietam, Knipe advanced to brigade command in the 12th Army Corps when several officers moved up the chain of command to fill in vacancies created when Major General Joseph Mansfield was mortally wounded. On April 15, 1863, Knipe was promoted to brigadier general, with the commission back-dated to November 29, 1862.

During the Gettysburg Campaign, Knipe was back in Harrisburg on medical leave for his wounds and a bout with malaria. With the Confederate Army moving into his home state, Knipe offered his services to General Darius Couch, who had been assigned to defend eastern Pennsylvania. Unfortunately, Couch was given no troops. He had to rely on hastily assembled militia from Pennsylvania and New York. Knipe was assigned to command a brigade and sent to Chambersburg to impede the advance of the Rebels. His inexperienced New York Militia, however, had no intention of facing the Southern veterans and fled back to Carlisle and ultimately Harrisburg.



Knipe artifacts displayed in State Museum

After Gettysburg, Knipe was sent west with the 11th and 12th Army Corps, later redesignated the 20th Army Corps. Knipe participated in all of the battles leading up to the fall of Atlanta, usually commanding a brigade but at times moving up to lead a division.

Knipe was in Nashville when Confederate General John B. Hood invaded Tennessee in an effort to draw Sherman out of Georgia. Commanding a division of cavalry, Knipe won a great victory during Hood's retreat from Nashville and was credited with the capture of 6,000 men and eight flags.

After the Civil War, Knipe returned to Harrisburg and was appointed postmaster by President Johnson. During the remainder of his life, he held a number of state and federal positions, including postmaster of the U.S. House of Representatives. General Knipe died on August 18, 1901, and is buried in the Harrisburg Cemetery (below).

