

Jacob Mooker

July 3, 1842-October 10, 1941

IN JUST A FEW MINUTES the Grand Army's 75th National Encampment Parade will pass this way. The Boys in Blue were here in Columbus, Ohio, in 1888 by the thousands with Gen. William T. Sherman. They were here in 1919 with many hundreds. They are here today, Sept. 17, 1941, ninety-two strong. It is rumored that several Civil War soldiers may march afoot! A thoughtful City Service Department has just gone over the mile-long route with sprinklers, releasing cooling jets of cold water upon the hot asphalt and granite cobbles. Thousands line Town, Third, High and Broad streets. The grandstand, beside the reviewing stand, holds 7500 more. Suddenly, with uninhibited martial pizzazz, the Marine Band, in the lead, renders "The Stars and Stripes Forever." The procession advances more slowly than expected. Spectators ahead become impatient. Spectators opposite the featured unit understand and applaud demonstratively, paying as best they can that unutterable abstract human response—**homage**. Civil War men *are* marching, at *this* point, past the reviewing stand. Here in the front is Jacob Mooker, 99, of Valparaiso, Indiana, fulfilling his finest hour. Still able to snappily step high to the cadence, though some of his old spring is surely missing, he is 5'2" of his youthful 5'4". Off to his left and slightly behind him marches his grandson, Vernon Mooker. Close following is Chicago's Albert E. Gage, 97; nearby is Richard R. Graham, 96, of Madisonville, Kentucky—these three having long been notable among the G.A.R.'s most diehard marchers. With them today are J.W. Petri, 91, of Denver; Oliver H. Castle, 94, of Los Angeles; Alfred Hende, 95, of Panama, Nebraska; and Edwin Morris, 95, of Elmira, New York.¹ Briskly, courageously they step out, these seven ancients, somewhat bent and stiffened though they are. Some onlookers quietly weep, while most cover their feeling with cheers, applause, picture-taking. Seven old men doing their thing. Seventy-four others ride in automobiles, but four of these seven on foot complete the entire parade route in the exacting heat . . . and "Jake" Mooker is the first of these to do so.

JACOB WAS BORN in Germany, the son of John Mooker (Holmoker, Homooker), Jan. 6, 1797-July 6,

1896. He was a farmer who, like many another villager in the old country, became attracted to the new lands in America. On Apr. 1, 1848, John with his wife, two daughters, fourteen and two-and-a-half, and son Jacob, six, took passage on an old sailing vessel bound for Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. During the three-month crossing, over half the people, including Jacob's mother, died of cholera. A few days after landing, his baby sister died in the quarantine camp where they were detained. Late one night John noiselessly unfastened a wide plank from the high fence and took his two remaining children out into the wilds and fresh, clean air. For three months they followed an Indian trail along the St. Lawrence until they came to Detroit. Though ragged and torn, they trudged on toward Chicago until early winter weather. By late November they entered a clearing in Indiana called Westville. Their feet were bare, bruised, swollen. Finally they rested along the old Sac Indian Trail in another clearing named Valparaiso or Valpo (for short). The chief attraction was the Goul House, Valpo's first hostelry, eventually replaced by the Spindler Hotel and still later by the Premiere Theatre. A fellow named Shinebarger lived east of Valpo, near Prattville, and he invited the sad family to stay the winter. Their home for two winters was a maple sugar house with an earthen floor and fireplace. They then moved to the old Jake Fleming place at Snake Island. Jacob's sister had already left home to work at a neighboring farm. Corn meal was their main staple those earliest years.

In 1851, John got a job with the company that was building the Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania Railroad. Young Jake also worked, earning from 16 to 24 cents a day while John made 40 to 50 cents wheeling gravel mostly. "It was the hardest work I have ever done," Jake would reminisce in after years. "I was only a child, but I was glad to be able to work and to help earn some money."² Jake and John did much work on the section from Wanatah west to Winslow. They saw the first locomotive run through, a glorious event. After nearly four years working for what became the Pennsylvania Railroad and not receiving all their wages, they were finally offered a discount of \$400 on eighty acres at \$10 an acre in Portage Township. They acquired the land, owing another \$400. On this farm Jake spent his contented "bachelor youth"

with his father, cutting, hauling and selling wood at \$2 a cord to the railroad at Bushore Crossing. Early-day steam locomotives were fueled with wood. In 1856 they bought their first rocking chair and a walnut chest. In his youth Jake went to school two weeks. The main thoroughfare then was a plank corduroy road from Valpo to Chesterton.

One spring morning when maple sapping was over, Jake, then nineteen, awoke to news of war with the South. Feeling grateful to the North as their land of opportunity, Jake said his goodbyes and hurried to Michigan City to enlist in the 29th Indiana. But he was refused for being too small. But John assured his well toughened boy, "Never mind, son, there's a day comin' when they'll be glad to take you, no matter what your size. This has only begun and it's agoin' to be a bitter fight to the finish."³ Jake plowed fields and cleared land another thirty-three months until Feb. 7, 1864, when he enlisted at Michigan City for service with Co. H, 128th Indiana Inf. After a march to Evanston they were issued uniforms and muskets. Though the long marches were a lark for Jake, they were an ordeal for most of the regiment—teenagers three, four and five years junior to Jake. Being part of Hovey's Division, they soon got named "Hovey's Babies." However, they marched through Kentucky and Tennessee to Chattanooga, got two weeks rest, and in two more had caught up with Sherman's army.

Pvt. Mooker, with the 128th Indiana, fought in many battles on the soil of Georgia which at least twice absorbed his blood. At Resaca May 14-15, 1864, he was badly wounded *in the leg* and had to be carried to an operating tent and placed on a table. A bullet had to be removed *without* any anaesthetic. Jake steeled himself to this severe test as the doctor's sharp instrument probed for and extricated the bullet. No murmur! Though his thigh was sore and painful, Jake the sixth day after was marching with his unit. He took part in operations on Pumpkin Vine Creek and in actions at New Hope Church and Altoona Hills, in operations about Marietta. On June 26-27, the 128th Indiana helped catch the enemy in a weak spot at Kenesaw Mountain.⁴ The Southerners had felled trees and sharpened them into points as a defense. Men in Jake's lines were sent in to cut off these barbs so they could penetrate. At 4:00 p.m. on the 27th the 128th was part of a heavy charge. It was at this time that Pvt. Mooker took a sorry thrust from a bayonet, cutting away several teeth. This would leave a lifelong scar from the corner of his eye across his cheek bone to the lower part of his jaw. The sun that day set upon many men dead or dying. "For weeks we couldn't step on a thing but dead bodies,"

Jake many times recalled.⁵ He again had his wound dressed without anaesthesia. At the large Army hospital in Knoxville he convalesced in bed where he was given whiskey and milk, what the men called a milkpunch. Upon recovering strength, Pvt. Mooker was allowed to go home to vote. He voted for Oliver P. Morton for governor while casting his ballot for Lincoln. After the glad reunion with his father, he returned a week later to duty at Evansville. His Company H was placed with the Veteran Reserves and became Co. D, 18th Regiment. Here Jake learned to play the drum at the captain's behest. They were stationed in Washington, D.C. The Civil War episode that ex-Pvt. Mooker would most often retell in his senior life occurred shortly after he began his new duty in the capital. Here is how he told it. (See also Dr. Zeeb Gilman, Sixth Unit, *The North's Last Boys in Blue*, unpublished.)

I could have had a share in the John Wilkes Booth reward money, but I didn't want it. Everybody present at the tragic scene asked for a share of the money except Maj. Gen. W.S. Hancock, Maj. A. C. Richards, William Rollins and me. The whole thing was a disgrace. Secretary of War Stanton on April 20, six days after Lincoln's assassination, had a reward circular sent all over, intended for the civilian population. The number of claims that flooded Stanton's office, once Booth was killed, included seemingly everyone who had seen the man immediately before the crime, everyone who had known him, or was in the Virginia vicinity during the search. Stanton was so bewildered he set up a Claims Commission to weed out the frauds. Claims poured in until December when Stanton published a notice that further claims would not be accepted after Jan. 1, 1866. The commission appropriated \$30,000 for the head officers of the pursuit force, and \$45,000 to be divided among lesser claimants. However, there was great dispute, so that Congress put a committee to work with final say. The final distribution gave Lt. Doherty, E. J. Conger and the two Lts. Baker \$32,000 divided according to their efforts. Boston Corbett, who killed Booth, got \$16,000; the rest was divided among twenty-six soldiers who had surrounded the Garrett tobacco shed.

I was one of that group, for I was the liaison messenger between the 18th Regulars and the 16th N.Y. Cavalry, and appeared on the scene as soon as word was passed that Booth and David E. Herold were hiding in Garrett's shed near Port Royal, Virginia. My duty took me there at that exact time. I had a message for Lt. Ed Doherty. I saw Herold come out from the straw-covered pile of discarded furniture in a corner of the shed. He tried to surrender without his rifle, but the officers wouldn't let him unless he brought his rifle. So he went back and got it, leaving the defiant Booth inside with one rifle. He's said he'd never be taken alive, and would take a few Union soldiers with him.



*Jake and Johnny standing in front of Valparaiso's Memorial Opera House, built in honor of Civil War veterans. (Courtesy of Joyce Philley Steltner of Buchanan, Mich.)
Upper right: Jake, 99, marching at Columbus, Ohio, in 1941. Lower right: Jake at 86.
(The two inserts, courtesy of Gladys Mott Mooker of Valparaiso.)*

When Herold was taken into custody, officers called to Booth and offered him a chance to surrender, but he wouldn't. So Bill Byrne and Hank Putnam slipped around back and set the building afire. Soldiers were peering through chinks in the logs, and as soon as the interior was lighted up they saw Booth, leaning on his crutch, his rifle leveled at the doorway. Corporal Boston Corbett, of the 16th, fired first. Booth dropped. The men went in and dragged his body out.

You know, being the son of a famous actor, Junius Brutus Booth, Wilkes was erratic like him. But Wilkes was also immature and open to suggestion. Numbers of Copperhead newspapers had openly suggested the assassination. I'm sure in my own mind that Wilkes Booth deliberately stepped out into the center of the shed so's to be seen and invite a bullet. I read someplace that not one of those who got reward money ever profited materially, and Corbett was finally sent to an asylum . . . One of the most peculiar things about Wilkes Booth's life was the Gypsy's Prophecy which his sister Asia received from her brother's hand when they were still not grownups. Booth wrote it all down too at the time—"You've a bad hand. All lines are criss-crossed. It's full of trouble. You've got in your hand a thundering crowd of enemies and not one friend. You'll make a bad end. You'll have a short life. I've never seen a worse hand."

It was the flag of the United States that brought about his death, for in escaping he was caught by its folds and thrown to the stage floor, breaking his leg.

In January 1871 Jake married Miss Rebecca Henry (Oct. 28, 1848-Jan. 18, 1918), daughter of William and Susannah Wise Henry. They raised three children: Susan Agnes "Aggie" (Oct. 14, 1871-Oct. 7, 1893); John Henry (1874-July 23, 1936), who married Hester Prentiss; and Catherine Mertella "Mertie" (Aug. 27, 1876-Aug. 31, 1956), who married Edward Ludolph.

In her Feb. 8, 1980 letter from Valparaiso, Faye Horner speaks of her (*great*) Uncle Jake—

Jake's wife and my dad's mother, Hannah, were sisters and very close all their lives, so I often visited Uncle Jake with my father, Garfield Samuel Horner. Mertie's brother, John, has a granddaughter, Joyce Philley Steltner, living in Buchanan, Michigan. Joyce had a brother, John David Philley, who was Jake's "most favorite" that was to get all Jake's "good," but Johnny tragically died of polio at age 15 in

Land Ready

A too dark dawn began his life
so he created make-believe moonrises
to light his way, always full moons,
white-silver silhouettes above
the real Earth he could not accept.
Late in life he learned to be
land ready, for the real land,
realized one way or another
he would go back to the land,
molecule by molecule,
the molecules knowing what to do
whether he be happy or sad
about his life.

—ROD FARMER

1940—a supreme hardship on Jake, who wanted him to have all his Civil War artifacts and 1864 Springfield. Mertie has a daughter, Lenore Smallidge, living in Cottage Grove, Minnesota, and grandson, Ronald Smallidge, who remembers Uncle Jake. My only son, David, 19, is in a Civil War re-enactment unit—Co. H, 9th Ind. Vols.—activated by our governor. Valparaiso's S.U.V. is very active in this.

Uncle Jake kept many scrapbooks. One was entirely on the Dionne Quintuplets. He used to pay children 5 cents a picture for any poses or shots of the Dionnes he didn't have. Most people today who knew Jake remember him as living in his own little house about thirty feet behind his son John's home at 556 W. Chicago St. He took his meals with the family, but was partial to being in his one-room retreat near the wood-burning, pot-bellied stove where he often rocked and read in a chair with cushioned arms. He liked children and let them visit. Uncle Jake grew his own tobacco. He handcrafted walkingsticks from Christmas trees by bending down the boughs (shortened to about 9") and fastening them against the inch or so thick bole or trunk. They were fancy and on top as a kind of soft handle, Jake glued on a scooped-out, store-bought rubber ball. During his last years these creations helped lend fire to his daily walks.⁶

In his Feb. 12, 1975 letter from Valparaiso University, Kenneth Nichols, of the Biology Department,

shares boyhood recollections of "that fine old man in blue"—

Mostly I remember as a boy envying him his late hours. My family moved to Valpo in 1933 when I was 12. We lived next door (across the alley) from John Mookers. John was a retired interurban operator, a son of the old man. Mr. Mooker lived in a room built on one end of their garage. At night I couldn't go to sleep until I'd heard the old man shuffle past my bedroom window on his way to his quarters. He spent afternoons downtown usually, came home for supper with John and his wife, and then walked back downtown for the evening. I've no idea where or with whom he spent his time. In any case, who was to tell him where he could go or when he had to come home?

His great-grandson, John Philley, whose home was in South Bend, would spend each summer with his grandparents and was a constant companion of the old man. Johnny was a year younger than I. My younger brother and I often wished we had a great-grandad to take us to the movies. Johnny accompanied the old man on several of his last encampments. We three boys often visited with Mr. Mooker. I most remember the pictures on his walls and their intricately carved frames. He was a woodcarver. He showed us some of his tricks—like balancing two dinner forks (stuck in a piece of wood) on the end of a pin. Johnny died of polio, but things were never the same afterward. The old man's shuffle seemed a bit slower.

In his Aug. 10, 1974, letter from Valparaiso, James O. Cox, 87, a retired business executive, reminisces—

Jacob Mooker was a nearby neighbor who always seemed happy, cheerful, and proud of his uniform and what it meant to him. I was visiting with him one day shortly before he went to Columbus for his last encampment. He said he had always marched on foot in the parades and would do so at Columbus as he did not want people to feel that he had lost the spirit, even though his friends urged him to take it a little easy. He was always tinkering around doing something. He had whittled out with his penknife a large picture frame in the shape of a horseshoe and had it hanging on the wall above his bed. He was so proud of it and wanted me to inspect it that he just climbed upon the bed and walked across to the wall and lifted it down and handed it to me. I guess he wanted to prove that he was able to march at Columbus so he could keep up his record. Word came that he had nearly exhausted himself—a real blow to his neighbors and friends throughout the nation. He was an honor to Valparaiso. His earthly dust lies in the family plot at Valparaiso's Kimball Cemetery.

Jacob Mooker was a comrade and commander of Chaplain Brown Post 106, G.A.R., and seldom missed the semi-monthly meetings whether held on the second Saturday or the fourth Tuesday. Yes, it was a fact that Jake stole off downtown twice daily as a routine. Why? He passed many a fine hour in the park or on a sidewalk

settee cronying with several long-time chums. Prominent among these last loyal few were Charles Doty and Thaddeus K. Whitlock. Comrade Doty, Valparaiso's only other Civil War veteran, survived Mr. Mooker seventeen months to die at ninety-six on Mar. 12, 1943. T.K. Whitlock, Canadian-born June 10, 1838, was not a veteran but a close friend who lived about a century. No doubt they talked over, perhaps debated, many issues—world, national, state, county and local, for Jake read the papers and radioed. World War I took one of his grandsons, and World War II took another. But old Mooker kept on marching, marching to a cadence that never really left him, that he could hear from old army days when his generation of Hoosier youthdom were carefree, limber, and ready to meet whatever came. In hours alone he thought of those youngsters of the 128th Indiana who hadn't come home. His gray-green eyes asparkle, he thought of them all, as he marched along trying to represent them well . . . at Muncie in '34, at Marion in '35, at Kokomo in '38, at Pittsburgh in '39, at Springfield in '40.

"It's my last march," Comrade Mooker kept saying audibly, inaudibly that Sept. 17th, 1941, at the conclusion of the 75th Encampment Parade in Columbus. Alternately bragging and regretting his age, he hastened to a gasoline station and ordered a bottle of orange soda-pop . . . "It's my last march" . . . and he knew it. Just three weeks later at 4:00 a.m. he quietly marched on, to bivouac with those whom he had so long missed.

Notes

1. *Journal of the 75th National Encampment, etc.*, G.P.O., Washington, 1942, pp. 205-208.
2. "Album Leaves," *Valpo Reminder*, July 19, 1940.
3. "Album Leaves," *Valpo Reminder*, July 26, 1940.
4. "Dyer's Compendium of the War of the Rebellion, 1959, p. 1156.
5. "Album Leaves," *Valpo Reminder*, July 26, 1940.
6. During a research swing into the Midwest, the writer had the extreme good fortune to rendezvous on June 11, 1980, with Faye Horner and Gladys Matt Mooker, a granddaughter-in-law, who shared their memories, pictures, and the walking-stick Jake used in his last parades. After their meeting in the Indiana State Historical Library, these three dined together and declared for themselves a Red Letter Day.

—JAY HOAR