

RAID, MURDER, AND RETRIBUTION: THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WELDON RAIL- ROAD, DECEMBER 1864

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The Weldon Railroad was one of the last important supply lines for Robert E. Lee's Confederate army besieged around Richmond and Petersburg during the last winter of the Civil War. In December 1864, Union commanders U.S. Grant and George Meade ordered a massive raid of over 20,000 men to destroy the railroad all the way to the North Carolina border.

What began as a straightforward military strike by troops (including this region's 83rd PA Volunteers), deteriorated into a vicious foray against the local civilian population, fueled by copious amounts of confiscated whiskey. This was followed by brutal retaliatory murders of isolated Union stragglers. The malicious cycle then escalated into the burning of wide swaths of civilian homes and the wanton destruction of foodstuffs. It was war at its most brutal level.

Historian George Deutsch will explore this little-known action, often from the point of view of local Erie soldiers who participated in the raid.