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Col. Leon Dyer served his country in three wars

By Seymour "Sy" Brody

Colonel Leon Dyer was an Orthodox Jew who fought in three wars for his country to secure freedom and justice. He was born in Baltimore, the son of Philip Maximilian Dyer. His father arrived in America from Germany in 1812, and changed his name to Dyer from Heim out of gratitude to a New Englander who had befriended him.

Dyer and his father were very active in the Jewish community. He was in the leadership of a group that started and built Baltimore Hebrew Congregation. Dyer always worked closely with his father in fulfilling their religious responsibilities and duties. The two helped organize and start the United Hebrew Society of Baltimore.



Dyer was also involved in the family meat-packing business and, in 1835, he went to New Orleans for the firm, a trip that altered the course of his life. While Dyer was there, the Governor of Louisiana talked him into taking the job of quartermaster general of the State Militia. For Dyer to accept that offer seemed strange, as this trip was going to be a short one and he had recently been elected to serve as a trustee of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation.

About this time, Stephen Austin, a leader of the American settlers living in Texas, announced that they had declared their independence from Mexico. They were in need of volunteers to help repulse the attack of the Mexican Army into Texas and slaughtered the defenders of the Alamo, Dyer and several hundred from New Orleans joined volunteers from the rest of the country to help the Texans.

Arriving in San Jacinto as the battle was ending, Dyer and his men helped in the final defeat of the Mexican Army. Dyer was part of the honor guard to escort General Santa Anna to Washington, D.C., after he was captured. He later received a letter of appreciation from the Mexican general.

After the war, Dyer joined the American Army, serving as a major on the staff of General Winfield Scott. One of Dyer's junior officers was Lt. George B. McClellan, who became a famous Civil War General. Dyer was with General Scott in Florida when they engaged the Seminole Indians, who massacred 100 American soldiers.

Dyer returned to Baltimore and, from 1840 to 1845, he devoted himself to business and his religious duties. He was very active in the building of a double tower granite synagogue on the corner of Lloyd and Walter Streets.

Once again, Dyer responded to his country's call when he fought in the Mexican War (1845-47) as a colonel under the command of General Scott. In 1852, President Millard Fillmore enlisted Dyer to deliver confidential dispatches to the Prussian government in Berlin. Dyer was commended for this mission. Dyer died in Louisville, Kentucky, at the age of 76.