



# Sergeant Major Frederick W. Gerber



*Sergeant Major Gerber in 1867*

A native of Dresden, Germany, Frederick Gerber arrived in the United States in the 1830s. He joined the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry in 1839 but returned to civilian life in 1844. His decision to reenlist when the company of engineers was authorized in 1846 brought him into the Corps of Engineers for the remainder of his life.

In the war against Mexico, Gerber won numerous accolades. During the Battle for Mexico City, he saved the life of Lt. George B. McClellan, a battalion officer. When the city was surrendered to the United States, Gerber was given the honor of sounding the surrender call. During the Civil War, Gerber had the responsibility for molding volunteer recruits into engineer soldiers, training the much needed pontoniers, sappers, miners, and pioneers.

On November 8, 1871, Gerber became the first engineer to receive the Medal of Honor. He was not recognized for any single act of

gallantry but for his unparalleled performance over many years. His citation reads, *“in recognition of long, faithful, and meritorious services covering a period of 32 years.”*

Gerber died in 1875. Gerber took great pride in being the senior enlisted man in the Engineers. Offered a commission several times, he declined each offer. As Gilbert Thompson, who served with him, later wrote, “practical and punctilious in all duties, he [Gerber] considered that to be the ranking non-commissioned officer in the Army was a greater honor than to hold a commission.”

Sergeant Major Gerber always performed his duty to the best of his abilities. His Medal of Honor is one of only a handful awarded solely for duty.



*Sergeant Major Gerber with his Medal of Honor*