

MONTANA HISTORY

Civil War veterans remembered in Montana after more than a century



Jaeger Held poses for a portrait next to the memorial markers for members of the Powder River Expedition of 1865 near Broadus. MIKE CLARK, Billings Gazette

By PAUL HAMBY - *Associated Press* - Saturday, November 14, 2020

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) - Pvt. Reuben B. Cavender, a native of Tennessee, enlisted to serve in the Union during the Civil War in March 1865. He would die in September of that year, far from any battlefield. His death occurred somewhere in what is now Custer County, Montana, and was chronicled only in military service records for more than 150 years. Today, his name joins 14 others carved into marble headstones standing in the wide open country outside of Broadus.

“Cavender volunteered to fight for the Union, and out of Missouri, a slave state...He wrote to his family hoping that he’d be coming home soon, before learning that he’d be heading West,” Jaeger Held, a 19-year-old who grew up on the ranch where the 15 headstones are located, told *The Billings Gazette*.

Held, with the help of historians, members of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War and residents of Broadus, spent over two years poring through thousands of documents to discover the names at the Powder River Memorial Cemetery.

Those 15 names face east, looking toward two buttes jutting from the earth like rocky, medieval battlements. The “Turret Buttes” got their name from the diarists who passed them in 1865. In the late summer of that year, several thousand U.S. soldiers passed the buttes along the Powder River.

The Powder River expedition was a punitive one. Following the November 1864 Sand Creek Massacre in the southeastern Colorado territory, where members of the 1st Colorado Cavalry Regiment killed hundreds of Cheyenne and Arapaho,

retribution came in the form of raids on ranches and wagon trains encroaching on the Great Plains.

In the summer of 1865, a force of what one eyewitness said to be 2,000 Cheyenne, Lakota and Arapaho, attacked Platte Bridge Station near what is now Casper, Wyoming. The offensive marked the peak of reprisals for the many left dead at Sand Creek, mostly women and children.

Even prior to the attack, those in charge of what was then the “District of the Plains” had aims to lead troops into the Dakota and Montana territories, where all three Plains Tribes had concentrated their forces. They went north where the buffalo were heavy, to Powder River Country.

In July 1865, a force of about 2,500 soldiers, civilians and Indigenous scouts comprised of three columns marched through the area of what would later become Northern Wyoming and Southeastern Montana. They were under the command of Brig. Gen. Patrick Connor. Connor made his orders clear: “You will not receive overtures of peace or submission from Indians, but will attack and kill every male Indian over twelve years of age.”

Those walking in the three columns met an unforgiving landscape. The two eastern

columns, consisting of soldiers from the 2nd Missouri Volunteer Light Artillery, 12th Missouri Volunteer Cavalry, and 16th Kansas Volunteer Cavalry regiments, suffered from a lack of supplies that compounded their misfortunes as they trudged along the Powder River.

Unlike the battles of the Civil War, where so many of them had experienced combat, fighting came in the form of brief skirmishes and surprise attacks. Not unlike the Civil War, however, many of the deaths inflicted on the men came from exposure to the elements and disease.

Between Sept. 1 and Sept. 10, 15 men died fighting, or from diseases like scurvy or dysentery, in the Southeastern Montana Territory. Although their bodies were never recovered, or their graves marked, their names remained on record.

It was through these records, digitized and available online, that Held began the process of building their memorial.

“If this project had been undertaken 20 years ago, we would have had to visit repositories in Missouri, Kansas and Washington, D.C., in order to get this amount of information. And I did it all from here,” said Held, who is currently a sophomore doing his coursework

remotely at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania.

The Department of Veterans Affairs will provide a headstone or burial marker at no cost to anyone who served and was honorably discharged, or died in service.

Those who can apply for headstones for those with no marked grave include relatives and veteran organizations like Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War.

Held, who had known of the expedition since he was a child, decided to start researching and applying for headstones in March 2017 after visiting a memorial to the fighting at Platte Bridge Station. In between his classwork at Billings Senior High School, he checked in on applications submitted to the VA's Memorial Products Service in Quantico, Virginia, and worked to revise those that were rejected.

It was at that same time that Held joined the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, founded in 1881 and comprised of over 6,000 members. Part of the mission of the SUVCW includes preserving the graves and memorials to Union soldiers, sailors and Marines, along with making sure that all those who did serve are properly remembered.

"It's imperative that we show our appreciation," said Fred Morgenthaler Sr., a member for over 25 years who currently serves as the secretary and treasurer for the SUVCW, Camp Chapman-Compliment No. 2.

"We can't just let those who served become a page in a history book...And that's why what Jaeger has done is so important. Those veterans, for whatever reason, their life, their memory, their honor was gone. Nobody remembered them," Morgenthaler said.

Combining military service records with information available on Ancestry.com, Held sent well over 100 letters to relatives of all 15 men asking that they approve of a headstone. Their responses forwarded to the VA secured 12. They began arriving in Broadus, solid marble and weighing nearly 230 pounds each. Three headstones donated by Billings Monument Co., ensured that every man had a marker.

Initially, Held planned to pore over written records and firsthand accounts to place the markers as near to where the men fell as he could. That would have involved spreading them out across several miles, with many on private property. Instead, he and his family

opted to give a bit of their own land to the memorial.

Neighboring ranchers offered the machinery and manpower to plant each stone slab in its concrete foundation, and a commemoration including some of the family members contacted by Held was conducted by the SUVCW in August of this year.

Although the memorial is now open to visitors, work still remains.

Not commemorated yet in stone, but still acknowledged by Held are the roughly 100 Lakota, Cheyenne and Arapaho killed during the campaign. While the VA will furnish headstones for U.S. service members killed, those for the Indigenous casualties of the Powder River Expedition will have to come from private donations.

“That’s something that even some relatives who I reached out to expressed, where they did not agree that the soldiers should have been here, but they did agree that they should get headstones,” Held said.

Held, currently the historian for the local chapter of the SUVCW, said the organization is also planning to add both a plaque detailing the expedition and a road marker for those who make the trip on to the property to view the memorial.

“It just seems so important to have this here ... It’s an opportunity for visitors to sit and reflect on the true cost of war, and what giving up one’s life truly means.”

Sons of the Union Veterans of the Civil War:
Those interested in donating to the Chapman-Compliment Camp #2 of the SUVCW may send contributions to P.O. Box 50185 Billings, Montana, 59105. For more information, contact montana.civilwar@gmail.com or SUVCW.montana@gmail.com.

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The War in Their Words: ‘Lee is Marching to Our Flank’



Robert Lee Hodge, History.net. October 2020

Union captain Frederick Von Fritsch had a horrible day at Chancellorsville.

When I was doing research for Time-Life Books' *Voices of the Civil War* series in the 1990s, I discovered the fascinating 1891 and 1901 pension requests of 11th Corps Captain Frederick Otto Von Fritsch. He wrote in detail of what he experienced during the 11th Corps' debacle on Saturday afternoon, May 2, 1863, at Chancellorsville, and other events that year that destroyed his health.



Friedrich Von Fritsch (Library of Congress)

"Baron" Von Fritsch was of German aristocracy. He had been educated at the military academy in Dresden, where he became a fine horseman, athletic performer, and swordsman. After three and a half years in the 1st Royal Cavalry, he was honorably discharged and came to America in December 1856. For several years he traveled America and Mexico.

Von Fritsch joined the 68th New York Infantry on November 1, 1862, at Centreville, Va. The 68th New York was made up of Austrians, Prussians, and Bavarians from Manhattan who had served in Union Maj. Gen. John Pope's

Army of Virginia before being melded into the Army of the Potomac.

Almost from the beginning of his service, Von Fritsch was put on the staff of Brig. Gen. Alexander Schimmelfennig, sometimes spelled Schimmelpfennig, a Prussian immigrant, political activist, and friend of socialist Carl Schurz.

Schimmelfennig was wounded in the 1848 German Revolutions, and later opposed the Communist leadership of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

The main document in Von Fritsch's pension addressing the Union veteran's ailments is titled, "History of the Bodily Sufferings of Frederick Otto Von Fritsch, late Captain, Company A., 68th New York Volunteer Infantry, and Staff Officer. In consequence of Wounds, Accidents, Exposures and Hardships experienced during the great War."

The below account is a graphic depiction of a series of accidents and bad luck for Captain Von Fritsch on May 2 at Chancellorsville. The captain dictated the account to his pension agent, hence the use of the third person. Some punctuation has been added; all bracketed additions are from additional accounts found in the pensions or for reader clarity, but nearly all is as Von Fritsch dictated on June 16, 1891.

Injury to Genital Organs and Incurable Strictures.

On May 1st, 1863, the 11th Corps was placed easily assailable and with no protection of its right flank, on the

plank road and turnpike, near
Chancellorsville, Virginia.

Captain F.O. Von Fritsch, detailed as Aide de Camp to General Schimmelpfennig, commanding 3rd Brigade of the 3rd Division, received the order to ride outside the Union lines to reconnoiter, about 5:30 P.M. He galloped at once towards the outposts [the 11th Corps skirmish-line, facing south from Orange Turnpike], accompanied by two orderlies. From there he rode out alone about one mile, in the direction of the visible camps of General [Stonewall] Jackson. Reaching an elevated point, he spied about with field glasses—loaned to him by Captain Renneberg, of the 68th N.Y.—and noticed wagons and troops of the confederate army moving towards the flank of our position. Trying to find out if the whole army was moving, he gave spurs and rode about a mile and half to our right, when three or four bullets whistled around his head and one ball struck his horse in the hind leg. He observed also that a troop of Fitz Lee's rebel cavalry [from the First Virginia Cavalry] were trying to cut him off and whipping his poor horse with his sword, he [was] chased first through the woods and then over an open plain towards the Union lines. The rebel cavalry outpost was pursuing him, firing all the time. One ball struck his saddle, one the heel of his boot, one damaged his scabbard, one smashed the field glasses, and one wounded the horse in the same damaged leg. The horse—called Jim—was of a superior breed and, excited as it was, managed to get along fast enough on three legs to keep ahead of the pursuers. At once Captain Von Fritsch distinctly heard the commands of Captain Steuernegel,

of the glorious 68th N.Y., commanding the outposts [a part of a company on the skirmish-line]: "Wait Boys! Wait!! Now Fire!!!"

Seven to nine bullets must have struck the horse of Captain Fritsch, many bullets whistled about the rider and the charger fell dead. Captain Von Fritsch fell with fearful force on the saddle knob and to the ground. [During the fall, Von Fritsch also hit a log and was knocked "senseless."] 'When I awoke I felt a severe pain near the testicles,' said Von Fritsch. The rebels, of course, had turned and fled. Captain Von F. raised himself with great difficulty and said to Capt. Steuernegel, who stood near the road: "Why in hell did you kill my horse?" "Upon my word, I did not recognize you in the dust and thought it was a cavalry attack," he answered.

When the dust and powder clouds passed away, Captain Von F. noticed a rebel, whose horse had been shot, running after his comrades.



Brig. Gen. Alexander Schimmelpfennig (USAHEC)

By this time his [Von Fritsch's] orderlies came out of the woods and he ordered one on a bay horse to dismount and help him in the saddle. Captain Steuernagel stood by, and said: "You are not off again?" at the same time petting the horse on the beak; the horse kicked and damaged Capt. Steuernagel's knee, disabling him from service.

A moment later Capt. Von F. was off like lightning; he wanted to capture the running rebel, to pump him out. When he nearly caught up with him, the fellow kneeled down and fired. The bullet struck the horse in the upper hind leg. "Surrender" the Captain halloed, but reaching for his sword, he found then he had left it when he fell from his horse Jim. Being unarmed, and the blood streaming down his horses leg, he turned and galloped back to head-quarters on the turnpike, to report.

General Schimmelpfennig, an educated soldier, but not very brave, cried out: "Take away that horse, don't show any blood here—take him to the rear!"

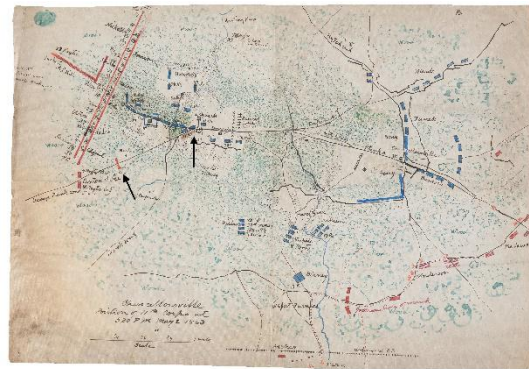
Captain Von F. saluted and said: "Lee is marching to our flank."

"Take away that horse or I will have you arrested."

Capt. Von F. rode off at a walk disgusted, the men cheering him.

This horse was the first wounded member of the 11th Corps, at Chancellorsville, that fell into the hands of the surgeons; they threw it down and probed for the bullet.

Captain Von F., not able to find his servant with the pack-horse, obtained an order to the Ambulance Corps for a spare horse and by this time a Sergeant came up with his [Von Fritsch's lost] sword. Using it as a stick, Capt. Von F. [with the help of a corporal] slowly worked his way to the Ambulance Corps. Arrived there he found a strong inclination to urinate but to his horror he could not do it. A terrible pain in the genital organs was created by his efforts. He fell down groaning. Some three or four surgeons surrounded him and he stated the above facts. They partially undressed him and one of them [Von Fritsch said, "Dr. Reissberg, very much excited, as some shells bursted near us, performed the operation with careless rapidity, no doubt damaging the channel..."] passed a catheter down to the bladder, when a heavy stream of water mixed with blood came forth and relieved him greatly. Some one gave him a drink of whiskey and he sang out: "I am all right now, get me a horse!"



May 2, 1863 Von Fritsch's bad day at Chancellorsville began when he left the location of the 68th New York at the intersection of the Orange Plank Road and the Orange Turnpike, circled, and headed southwest. He ran into Confederate cavalry pickets, also circled, and had to quickly turn around and spur

his horse for the safety of his own lines.
(Library of Congress)

The Lieutenant in charge furnished a large, thin roan with a miserable saddle. He [Captain Von Fritsch] begged for a blanket, and folding it carefully over the saddle, mounted and reported for duty.

He reported again that Lee was marching towards our right flank, but General Schimmelfennig ordered the men to cut down trees and barricade the [Orange Plank Road] road in front of us and nothing was done to strengthen the skirmish line on our flank.

Still, according to [Maj. Gen.] Abner Doubleday's book about Chancellorsville, —page 29, Gen. S.[chimmelfennig] reported the hostile movement to Howard.

On May 2, when the attack took place, Captain Von F. was ordered to bring Colonel Hecker's [82nd Illinois] Regiment to [the] cross-road[s]. "Too late!" halloed Gen. S.[chimmelfennig] when he returned, followed by it; and at that moment a ball struck Capt. Von F. in the belt plate, throwing him from his horse, weak as he was.

Colonel Meisenburg, Adjutant General of the 11th Corps, just passed by and Capt. Von Fritsch unfortunately told him, "I am killed." (Reported in *The New York Herald*: Baron Von Fritsch, Aide de Camp, killed May 2nd.)

On investigation it turned out, that a round ball had struck the belt plate, passed through the leather belt, tore off a button of the uniform, passed

through the clothes but did not enter the bowels. The stomach showed all colors and for some days Capt. Von F. could only speak in a whisper. He at once remounted, under a terrible fire, and worked hard to stop the panic stricken troops and tried to rally them under the flag held by [11th Corps commander Maj.] General [Oliver] Howard.

After witnessing the terrible slaughter of the rebels by gallant Captain [Hubert] Dilger's and others batteries, on an eminence overlooking Chancellorsville, in the evening, Captain Von F. rode about trying to find his General and troops, but they had run some miles further.

Passing a cabin near [Maj. Gen. Joseph] Hooker's head-quarters, he observed a tub and got a negro woman to make him some hot water. Taking a sit-bath he was able to urinate again, and a cup of coffee from the woman and a few hours sleep on muddy ground gave him new life.

He did hard service on May 3rd and 4th until the return to the old camp. There he procured some very thin bougies [catheters] from Washington, by a sutler, Adams, and after some lessons by Assistant Surgeon Reissberg, he managed to insert them himself."

During the Gettysburg

Campaign, Von Fritsch augmented his saddle with a feather pillow but still suffered pain from his Chancellorsville injury. During the 11th Corps' retreat through Gettysburg on July 1, 1863, Von Fritsch managed to reach the Union lines south of town. General Schimmelfennig, however, was not so

lucky, and was trapped in a backyard on Baltimore Street.

Von Fritsch's bad luck continued on East Cemetery Hill when a Union cannon recoiled and ran over his right big toe. Regardless of his painful wounds Von Fritsch stayed in the saddle, despite repeated fainting spells and falling from his horse, during the pursuit of the Army of Northern Virginia after Gettysburg. At Berlin, Md. (modern-day Brunswick), Von Fritsch was ordered to escort the 135th Pennsylvania Infantry to Philadelphia to be mustered out, and while there he sought medical attention for his foot and genitals. His boot had to be cut off, and Doctors found an inoperable sore under his toenail. He would be lame the rest of his life. Von Fritsch later went to Bethlehem, Pa., for a warm water cure for his genital injuries.

Miraculously Von Fritsch returned to active duty in late 1863. By then, the 11th and 12th Corps of the Army of the Potomac had been combined into the 20th Corps and transferred to the Northeastern Alabama and East Tennessee area to reinforce Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's Chattanooga Campaign. Captain Von Fritsch continued to have Dr. Reissberg, surgeon of the 68th New York, administer bougies "every Sunday morning to keep the channel open."



Major General Oliver Otis Howard did not give credit to Von Fritsch for saving his life at Chancellorsville, and the captain never forgot the slight. (Library of Congress)

At Bridgeport, Ala., Von Fritsch helped guard a military bridge over the Tennessee River. While living in a nearby camp, he developed bronchial catarrh, chills, fever, and Rheumatism. "He coughed day and night and filled a big hole next to his field bed with greenish matter, which he had to spit out continually," states a document in his pension file.

When his regiment left East Tennessee, it left Von Fritsch behind. A missive in his pension file explained, "It is disagreeable to say, but they left him alone in the woods with a few very sick men, and he crawled on his hands and knees to the railroad station and was lifted in an empty freight car. With much trouble he reached a hotel in Nashville and got a warm room. This change worked wonders, in a week he would leave the bed, and a kind sutler drove him to the hospital. There he soon recovered. Ordered back to his command, he waited for the 20th Corps two weeks in the same woods, near a Commissary who refused him shelter. The cough returned and finally

developed itself into chronic catarrh, of which he suffers to this date [June 16, 1891], in spite of having used all known remedies. He catches cold frequently as a result of it, and suffers often from throat troubles."

And his Chancellorsville injury also plagued him. In 1868 Von Fritsch could only urinate by sitting in hot water because of his severe wound. He visited Leipzig, Germany, to consult a specialist but found little relief. In 1885 he returned to Dresden for an operation, and after terrible suffering he became better.

In his June 1901 letter to the pension office Von Fritsch, living in Manhattan, stated, "So I claim, that accidents and hardships of 3 years and 2 months service during the War have made me a sufferer of a very severe stricture, Rheumatism, Chronic Catharrh, creating blindness, besides very bad piles and a sore toe. My life was ruined mostly by the stricture, as it prevented me from marrying, and I had to give this explanation to the mother of a young lady, worth millions, who was determined to secure me as a husband." In the same letter he hoped, "to fall in soon for the last Roll Call."

The conclusion of the pension sums up the long-lasting feeling Frederick Otto Von Fritsch had toward Oliver Howard, the former 11th Corps commander at Chancellorsville. Von Fritsch was invited to a November 2, 1901, banquet at the Waldorf Astoria in honor of General Howard. In a reply sent on November 15, 1901, Von Fritsch explained why he could not attend:

To Colonel H.H. Adams, New York,

Dear Companion:

Your kind invitation has been received, and while I love to meet old Comrades on such occasions, I am obliged to send my regrets for the following reasons: General Howard, while commanding the 11th Corps at the terrible battle of Chancellorsville could have saved this gallant Corps and turned defeat into glorious victory, had he given credit to reports made by immortal Captain Dilger of the Ohio battery and by myself, as Aide de Camp to General Schimmelpfennig, at 3:15 P.M. on May 2, 1863. We both reported after a most daring Reconnoitering ride far outside our wrongly placed line, that the enemy was marching to our flank and that a total change of position was necessary. I had been fired at by Infantry and Cavalry and a confederate outpost had chased me close to our lines, that Captain Steuernagel of the 68th Regt. N. Y. Vols. ordered his sharpshooters [skirmish line] to fire at us, killing my horse by many balls, and dismounting three or four Rebel Cavalrymen who then fled. I was badly damaged by the fall of my horse but reporting on another horse soon after, I was told that I was mistaken, and that the enemy was retiring.



nutcracker seat A document in Von Fritsch's pension file states he injured himself on his McClellan saddle at Chancellorsville, perhaps a leather-covered officer's grade version of the saddle, like this one. (Heritage Auctions, Dallas)

The second reason is, that, when soon after 5 P. M. the furious attack on our flank took place and General Howard jumped or fell from his horse on the well known Cross-roads, I caught the frightened animal and assisted the General to mount against his protest, enabling him to gallop to the rear from the spot, where hundreds were killed at that very moment, and when batteries without drivers came chasing right in the midst of our brave soldiers, who hardly knew which way to turn and to fire.

In his official report General Howard stated that some kind Orderly helped him in the saddle, and thus deprived Captain Frederick Otto Von Fritsch of the honor having saved, most probably, his life. I only know that a minute later I got shot in my belt plate, that a bullet destroyed my spy-glasses, another tore away my heel of one of my boots and two balls entered the legs of my charger.

For the above reasons you cannot expect me, dear Colonel, to attend a Banquet in honor of General Howard, although I

know that he served afterwards with great distinction and received even the thanks of Congress.

Very truly Yours,

Companion Von Fritsch”

Robert Lee Hodge is an Emmy Award-winning filmmaker and preservationist who has organized events that have garnered over \$175,000 for battlefield preservation. He has been featured in The New York Times, Preservation Magazine, and appeared on PBS, as well as in many other publications and television appearances. He can be reached at robertleehodge@yahoo.com.

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CIVIL WAR WOMEN, GENERALS WIVES. KATE HEWITT

**Fiancée of General John Reynolds
womenhistoryblog.com**



Catherine

Mary Hewitt became engaged to future Union General John Reynolds in California in the late 1850s. Since they were from different religious denominations –

Reynolds was a Protestant, Hewitt a Catholic – she kept their engagement a secret, even from her parents. Kate and Reynolds had decided that if he were killed during the war and they could not marry, she would join a convent.

Born in Stillwater, Saratoga County, New York, there is some dispute about the year of Kate Hewitt's birth but 1836, despite the date on her grave marker, appears to be the most consistent and logical year. Her life from the beginning was tragic and tumultuous as she lost her mother and brother at a young age.

Kate left for San Francisco, California in 1856 to serve as a governess in the household of relatives, but soon began working in a Catholic girls' school run by the Daughters of Charity, where she began her conversion to that religion. It must have been there that she met Major John Fulton Reynolds, a career United States Army officer, who was then on duty in San Francisco.

Kate and John fell in love, and ultimately became engaged to be married, but kept it a secret because of his position with the army during the Civil War and her newfound faith, which was unpopular in some social circles. When Kate returned to the East in 1860, she entered the Academy of the Sacred Heart, where she became a convert to the Catholic faith.

After the humiliating Union defeat at the Battle of Chancellorsville, President Lincoln ordered the relief of General Joseph Hooker. On the night of June 27, 1863, General [George G. Meade](#) took command of the Army of the Potomac in Frederick, Maryland. Meade had to immediately deal with General [Robert E. Lee](#)'s invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania.

General Meade drew up a defense plan that included a line of troops that stretched from Middleburg to Manchester, Maryland. By June 30, General John Reynolds and his First Corps were in the middle of that line near Emmitsburg, Maryland, with 80,000 troops.

General [John Buford](#) and his cavalry were the first to encounter Lee's Confederate forces just outside Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on July 1, 1863. He hastily scribbled notes to General Reynolds, urging his rapid march to the battle site. Buford was at the Seminary in Gettysburg when Reynolds and his forces came on the scene.

Reynolds entered the fray, quickly assessed the situation and sent a member of his staff to General Meade with this situation report: "Tell the General that we will hold the heights to the south of the town, and that I will barricade the streets of the town if necessary."

Personally, directing his men, General Reynolds shouted out, "Forward men, forward for God's sake, and drive those fellows out of the woods." But before long a Confederate sniper shot and instantly killed General Reynolds, who wheeled and fell from his horse. The characteristically quiet Reynolds was dead. His loss was keenly felt by the army. He was loved by his men and respected by his peers.



Image: General John Reynolds

The Union Army quietly removed the body of its First Corps commander from the field by ambulance. Then, because his family lived so close to the battlefield, Reynolds' body and personal effects were sent to the home of his sister Catherine on Spruce Street in Philadelphia, there to lie in state until the public funeral services scheduled for July 4 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the family's hometown.

Kate Hewitt's existence was discovered by John's family when they found her Catholic medal and a gold ring in the form of clasped hands around his neck. Inside the ring were inscribed the words Dear Kate. They also noticed that his West Point ring was missing.

On the morning of July 3, while the battle was reaching its climax 100 miles away, Kate Hewitt called at the house on Spruce Street. Catherine and her sisters rushed downstairs to meet their beloved brother's fiancée and embraced her warmly.

While the introductions were taking place Kate maintained her composure, but on seeing John's body she broke down and wept. She explained that she had hesitated to come to Catherine's home because she knew no one in the family, but that she could not resist the wish to see John again. Kate returned in the evening to sit by him during the night-long vigil. She returned John's ring but kept the Catholic medal he had worn.

Reynolds' sister, Jennie Reynolds Gildersleeve, wrote to her brother Will, a captain in the United States Navy:

She seems to be a very superior person. We all regret that he [John] had not told some of us about her, and that we had [not] known her, yet are happy she

came and had all the comfort we could offer her.

Eight days after Reynolds' burial in Lancaster, Kate Hewitt applied for admission to the Sisters of Charity Convent in Emmitsburg, Maryland. This was, she said, part of the plans that she and John had made for their future. If all went well, they would be married after the war. But in the event of General Reynolds' death, they had agreed that Kate would become a nun.

The establishment of the Sisters of Charity was located only ten miles from the Gettysburg battlefield where General Reynolds had been killed. The sisters had maintained a convent and school there since their founding by Mother [Elizabeth Ann Seton](#) in 1809. Reynolds and his First Corps had passed the convent grounds only a few hours before he was killed.

In her eagerness to learn every detail of her fiance's death, Kate asked the Reynolds sisters to bring the General's orderly, Sergeant Veil, to visit her at the convent. Veil later wrote about the occasion:

I, of course, was glad to do so: and next day we drove over and, through the influence of the [Reynolds sisters], I was allowed to enter the convent and see the young lady. Miss Hewitt was a very beautiful lady, highly educated. I had to tell her all about the General, his last moments, and so forth, and she wanted very particularly to know if he had left any last message.

When we came to leave, she said, "Mr. Veil, I have a little token here I had for the General, some of my own work, and I want to give it to you as a token

of remembrance of both of us,” and taking from the folds of her dress a small package, she handed it to me. I thanked her for it and left. After we had left the convent, I told the [Reynolds] sisters of what had taken place, and on opening the little package which was nicely done up and tied with a ribbon, found a very beautiful embroidered handkerchief — the Coat-of-Arms of the United States, very beautifully done — and I have the handkerchief and token to this day.

A few months later, Eleanor Reynolds wrote to Sergeant Veil that Miss Hewitt, now Sister Hildegardis (the Reynolds girls had helped her select the name), had gone to Albany, New York, and was teaching in a large school that the Sisters of Charity had recently opened there.

And then on January 15, 1867, Eleanor wrote that Kate was well and that they had spent a week with her at Albany in October and had “cheered her somewhat.” She said that they tried to make Kate a yearly visit.

On August 11, 1868, five years after Kate Hewitt had kept her pact with her lost fiancé by entering the convent at Emmitsburg, Eleanor wrote:

Miss Hewitt is still at Albany – I hope we shall visit her in October. She is not strong and has a cough that is almost constant. She says she is happier as a ‘sister’ than she would be ‘in the world.’

But the October visit to Albany never took place. On September 3, 1868, for reasons unknown, Kate left the Community of the Sisters of Charity. She had made no vows, and was free to leave if she found the life

was too much for her. The notation of her leaving was the end of Catherine Mary Hewitt’s association with the Sisters of Charity.

Still mourning for a man that was neither husband nor blood relative, Kate was alone in the world. She apparently gave up on the Catholic faith and returned to her hometown of Stillwater, New York. She never married.

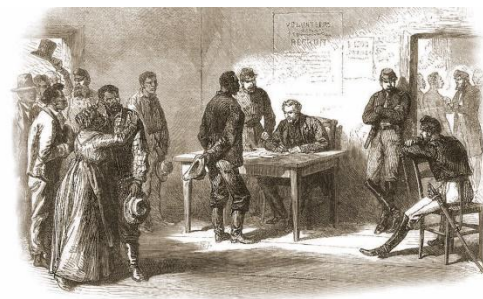
Catherine Mary Hewitt died of pneumonia at Stillwater in 1895. She is buried in the Stillwater Union Cemetery, not far from the Saratoga Battlefield. Her stone is an octagon and symbolic of rebirth and resurrection. The word *Mizpah* is carved on the stone and is a Hebrew benediction meaning, ‘May God watch over you until we are together again.’ Kate Hewitt is emblematic of the generations lost forever because of civil war.

SOURCES

Catherine “Kate” Mary Hewitt

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Songs of 1865: How the Various Parties to the Civil War Saw the Struggle’s End



The presence of African American soldiers in Ulysses Grant’s Union Army was particularly prominent during the Siege of

Petersburg. (Pictorial Press/Alamy Stock Photo)

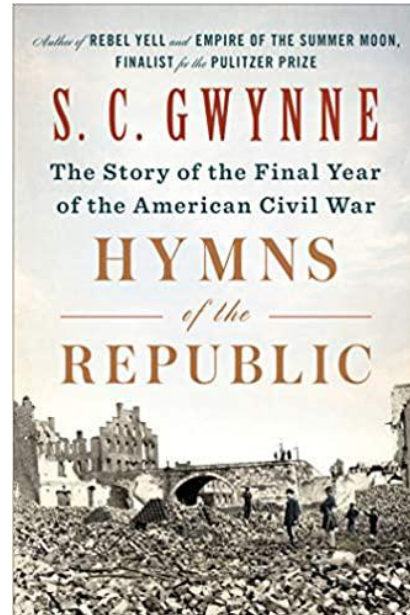
Interview conducted by Steven L. Davis
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Historian S.C. (Sam) Gwynne's "Hymns of the Republic" looks at the Civil War's final year from multiple perspectives.

The critical and financial success of his 2010 book [Empire of the Summer Moon](#), a New York Times bestseller and Pulitzer Prize finalist, allowed S.C. (Sam) Gwynne a long-awaited, golden opportunity to expand his literary horizons and to take a few risks with any subsequent endeavors. A transplanted Yankee now living in Austin, where he worked as executive editor at Texas Monthly magazine, Gwynne began searching for a Civil War topic he could explore, finally deciding to take on Confederate Lt. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson. Gwynne had been intrigued by the Civil War since he was a young adult but had not yet written to any extent about America's seminal struggle. Not only was [Rebel Yell: The Violence, Passion and Redemption of Stonewall Jackson](#), published in 2014, another bestseller for Gwynne—and a finalist for both the National Book Critics Circle Award and the PEN Literary Award for Biography—it gave him a new appreciation of the Civil War and of one of its most luminous yet controversial commanders.

In 2016, Gwynne penned a book about another of his favorite topics, football, but in 2019 he returned to the war for the critically acclaimed [Hymns of the Republic: The Story of the Final Year of the American Civil War](#), which was released in a paperback edition in October. Gwynne, 67, talked

to America's Civil War during a Zoom Q&A session at the annual Boerne (Texas) Book & Arts Festival on October 4, 2020.H



Hymns of the Republic: The Story of the Final Year of the American Civil War
By S.C. Gwynne
Scribner, 2019, \$32

ACW: Tell us about the title of your book, *Hymns of the Republic*?

S.C. Gwynne: It's a play on "Battle Hymn of the Republic." At some point in my research, I became aware of something that was known as the "Black Battle Hymn of the Republic." It was sung by slaves and Black Americans. The idea just suggested to me that there were other hymns, that there were hymns of different constituencies and people. What I mean by that is by looking at this last year of the war, which is what the book is about, it was meant to be a look at different pieces of that war and not, say, simply the Union Army.

ACW: This is your second book on the Civil War—you earlier authored an account of Stonewall Jackson. How did you get interested in the subject?

S.C. Gwynne: Two simple words: Bruce and Catton. Bruce Catton was one of the main popularizers of the Civil War. He was the guy who made everybody say, “We just love reading about the Civil War.” He had best sellers like *Mr. Lincoln’s War* and *A Stillness at Appomattox*. I guess I was in early adulthood when I first read Catton. So many books about the Civil War are the bullet-by-bullet account of what went on: What the 23rd North Carolina was doing at 9:43 a.m., extremely detailed battle stuff like that. Which is fine, and I sort of like to read that stuff, but it’s not as entertaining, it’s not a great narrative. Catton wrote great narratives.

I always found the Civil War the most compelling thing in American history; to me nothing is even a close second to it. It is definitive of our nation, dramatic and complex beyond your wildest dreams, just a wonderful thing to write about. I was lucky enough with *Empire of the Summer Moon* to have a bestseller. Most writers are not lucky enough to have that and there are plenty of really good books that don’t sell well. I got lucky, and when you get lucky like that, a window opens, if however briefly. At some point, I thought if I could just do anything I wanted to do, what would that be? I came very quickly to two names: Ulysses S. Grant and Stonewall Jackson. And I thought Grant had been a little overdone. It seems as though every year there are 20 books on Grant.

ACW: Regarding your narrative style in this new book. As a recent review noted:

“In the aftermath of the war, Herman Melville published *Battle Pieces and Aspects of War*. Years later, Walt Whitman released *Specimen Days*. For many writers, it seemed that the best way to tell the war’s story was through specific moments and lives. S.C. Gwynne, in his miracle and masterful *Hymns of the Republic*, follows in that tradition.” You’re being compared here to Melville and Whitman in your approach. Was that deliberate?

S.C. Gwynne: There’s no shortage of stuff out there, so the idea at some level is to try to cut through and make fresh observations, to try to step back from that awesome burden of looking at the battles up close. Now, I did some of that in my Stonewall Jackson book. The reason is because he was possibly the most brilliant military commander in history and you have to look at the battles—you have look at his [1862 Shenandoah] Valley Campaign—and follow it closely, because otherwise how can you establish his genius?

But in *Hymns* I wanted to step back a little bit and write a less data-heavy narrative. We have a wonderful writer here in Austin, Lawrence Wright. Larry has a great explanation of how he structures his narratives. He says the first thing you’ve got to find is a “donkey.” The donkey is the character who is interesting and engaged enough to carry the narrative. In “Rebel Yell,” I had one main “donkey,” Jackson himself. In *Hymns*, because I’m sweeping through an entire year in *Hymns*, there are going to be different donkeys. Young Robert E. Lee at one point is. Clara Barton at one point is. This great Black journalist from Philadelphia, Thomas Morris Chester, is another one. Salmon P. Chase another.

John Singleton Mosby. The weird genius/incompetent Ben Butler. And so on. These guys carry that narrative along in a way that I hope helps the reader make sense of what's going on.

ACW: Your opening chapter sets up the book nicely. Various characters are introduced, from the “Angel of the Battlefield” Clara Barton, to the Black soldiers, to the great Confederate strategists who bedeviled the North, to the incompetent Union generals. At first these feel like individual portraits, but then they start meshing to collaboratively tell the story of that final year. We feel like we are on the front row of history. You take us into Washington, D.C., in March 1864. You describe what the capital is like at that time. You describe the arrival of Ulysses Grant.

S.C. Gwynne: I set it up by talking about the social whirl that's going on inside Washington in Spring 1864, the presidential receptions and levees and all these huge parties. There is finally some hope for the North in the war. This hope is about to be dashed, but for the moment everyone is obsessed with the arrival in Washington of Ulysses S. Grant, the great victor of the West.

The leading Union generals in the first part of the war were a disaster, one incompetent after another—George McClellan probably being the most famous—who gave away the Northern advantages of troops and men and material and everything else. Grant was different. And yet here was this other guy. He had won at Forts Henry and Donelson, at Shiloh, Vicksburg, and Chattanooga. He fought hard and didn't back off and didn't lose. So, finally he's arriving. That's the moment I choose.

It's a great story because it tells you how different the world was. Grant arrives at Union Station with his son Fred, who was 13, and his assistant—that's it. No glorious entourage, as McClellan had once had. Grant is coming to Washington to accept a commission that only two generals before, George Washington and Winfield Scott, had ever been given: lieutenant general. Grant gets off the train and is standing in Union looking around, but because of a logistical error no one has come to meet him. So, he takes a cab to the War Department, where his boss Henry Halleck is. But Halleck's not there, so then he takes another cab to Halleck's home, Halleck's not there either. So, having tried three times now to find somebody who would welcome him, Grant goes to the Willard Hotel. He walks in unrecognized, and one of the reasons he's unrecognized is because, other than his four years at West Point, he has never spent much time in the East.

Nobody knows what he looks like, which is interesting because Grant by this point is as famous as Lincoln and much more popular. He's had millions of words and ink expended on him. He's got a full-length painting of him hanging over in Congress. But he walks into the Willard unrecognized. He and Fred go upstairs. When they come down for dinner, he seats himself unrecognized. Now remember the level of fame we're talking about here; it's as if Barack Obama and Lady Gaga walked through the lobby of the Willard unrecognized.

Eventually the people in the dining room begin to realize who he is and eventually the place goes completely crazy, but nowhere near as crazy as the White House does an hour later when he shows up at a reception for Lincoln. The scene

quickly turns into a sort of genteel riot, with ladies trying to touch him, and dresses being torn, and at one point William Seward, the secretary of state, has to take Grant up onto a sofa to avoid being crushed by the crowd.

The reason for all this is because Grant was coming to save the Union. Nothing less. That is what people in the North thought. The Confederates' indomitable genius of the East [Lee] was going to meet the great Union genius of the West in single combat, if you will, in Northern Virginia. The fighting was going to be definitive and the war was going to be over. People on both sides believed that.

My opening chapter tries to capture this moment when the future of the war and that nation—and specifically the fate of Abraham Lincoln, seemed to hang in the balance. Everything was indeed in the balance.

ACW: It is fascinating to read about the African American soldiers fighting for the North and the belated attempt by the Confederacy to perhaps recruit some slaves to fight for them. Tell us more about that.



*New England native S.C. Gwynne spent the early part of his career at Time magazine before heading to Texas.
(Photo by Kenny Braun)*

S.C. Gwynne: I spend a lot of time on Black soldiers in the book. The big picture is that 180,000 Black soldiers fought in the Union Army, mostly in the final year of the war. That's 10 percent of the army, which still kind of shocks me. I knew a few things about the Civil War growing up, but I knew nothing about that side of it. When Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in January of 1863, he included a paragraph that changed American history: Black soldiers could be combatants in the war. And not only that, but it was going to be encouraged. In Lincoln's mind, the driver of real emancipation was going to be enlistment. Enlistment was going to be the way it was going to happen, not only for escaped slaves but for all African American men in the North. Suddenly someone crosses through a Union army line and comes out on the other side a man with a uniform and a salary.

Now, these African American soldiers were not treated very well. They were second class citizens in the army, treated and paid as such. But the fact was, as Frederick Douglass said, you put a gun in his hand, you give him money, you put a uniform on him, he's fighting for the United States, he's no longer a no-account slave—he is a soldier and citizen. In the last year of the war, this is when it really comes to bear, this enormous weight of Black soldiers. And, remember, it was not easy for these guys, they were not treated well by Northern officers. They weren't paid fairly, they were abused—in some cases they were treated like slaves by those officers.

ACW: They acquitted themselves so well time and time again. The story you tell about the African American soldiers being the first ones into Richmond when the Confederate capital falls is a great story.

S.C. Gwynne: It's April 1865. Richmond has fallen, it's burning—everybody in the government has fled. As the Union soldiers approach, they're expecting to see what they usually see, which is trenches bristling with guns. But they realize there's no one there and just walk right through these enormous defensive positions, now empty. The first ones through are the black 25th Corps. They end up stopping about three miles east of the capital, at which point the mayor of Richmond officially surrenders, and the slaves come out and they can't believe their eyes. They didn't even know there was such a thing as a Black soldier. From there a single road leads into Capital Square, the center of Richmond. And it's very clear, and they all understand that the first infantry into the fallen, burning capital of the South is going to be doing something that will go down in history. The men who did it would be telling stories about it to their great grandchildren. Everybody knew what that meant.

At this point, the all-White 24th Corps of the Union Army of the James shows up, and now a decision has to be made. Who is going first? And, of course, that's a no brainer, in the context of the Union Army in 1865. The White guys are going first. And so the men of the 24th take off down the road, visions of glory in their eyes. But the Black soldiers just won't accept this. So they take off through field and farm and over stone walls and fences, and

they're so motivated that they get into the city core before the White soldiers do.

Now the White soldiers are very upset about this, and in fact a campaign was started right at that moment to discredit the Black soldiers and to revise the history so that it was the White soldiers who got there first. But history has favored the Black soldiers. One of the reasons for that is that a Black correspondent for a Philadelphia newspaper, Thomas Morris Chester, happened to be there. He was the only Black correspondent at a major Northern newspaper—the *Philadelphia Press*—and he had positioned himself so he could see who the first soldiers were. He then wrote about it. In order to write his story, he repairs to the Confederate House of Representatives, where he is seated in the House Speaker's chair when a Confederate officer who had been paroled approaches him and tells him to leave. Chester looked up, said nothing, and continued writing. The Confederate officer charged him, whereupon Chester, who was a pretty big guy, stood up and decked him. Now furious, the Rebel officer turns to a nearby Union officer and says, something to the effect of, give me your sword so that I may thrash this man. The Union soldier declines but offers to clear the floor of the House of Representatives so the two men could have a fight. The Confederate officer declines the invitation.

Later Chester explains why he had gone to sit in the chair, an action that might have been punishable by death the day before. When asked about it, he says, "Well, I thought about it and I

thought I would exercise my rights as a belligerent.” That was one of my favorite stories, and there were so many of them in the war.

ACW: The controversy that has emerged over Confederate statues, what is your take on that?

S.C. Gwynne: It’s an interesting question. I mean, I’m a Yankee. And when I first came to Austin and saw that statue on the south lawn of the capitol—which basically was a statue of the Confederacy saying, “These boys died for states’ rights” and the old “Lost Cause” BS about how the war wasn’t about slavery—I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t believe there was a statue like that on the lawn of the capitol. Of course, I was a naïve Yankee and didn’t yet understand.

I’ve come to the conclusion that you cannot defend these statues. I came to it reluctantly initially because the historian in me opposed the idea of expunging people and events from history so that no one would ever know what had happened. Therefore, they have to either be sequestered somewhere or they have to be taken down. I had a really interesting conversation last summer with Stonewall Jackson’s great-grandson, who wrote a column in the Richmond paper advocating that the Jackson statue there be taken down. I mean, even Jackson’s heirs want that to happen.

But I also have a Yankee perspective on it, and it’s a very slippery slope. If our standard is everyone who owned slaves or fought for the South has to be erased from history or put in some

dark and shameful corner, then you have a real problem on your hands. Fifteen U.S. presidents owned slaves, ten while they were in office. Ulysses S. Grant owned slaves; Abraham Lincoln’s wife was from a wealthy, slave-owning family. My native land, the seemingly pure and pristine and morally wonderful Connecticut and Massachusetts, was responsible for most of the American slave trade.

Newport, R.I., alone launched a thousand voyages to the Middle Passage, and the slave trade from the Middle Passage was way more heinous than what 98 percent of any Confederates ever did. Bolting people into 4-foot high decks for the passage across the ocean, this is what my people did. The biggest slave market in the country was in New York City. To pick out, say, Lafayette McLaws or some other Confederate general and say, “Well, that statue has to come down.” I’m not going to disagree with it, but there’s a certain sanctimoniousness, particularly among people who are from where I’m from, that alleges and somehow believes that we weren’t responsible.

The most brilliant speech ever given was Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address. He said what no one at the time was saying, that slavery is a sin of which we are all guilty. Everybody was pointing fingers back then, right? North, South, you’re guilty, you’re to blame, you’re the slave owners. Lincoln says, “No, we are all guilty, this is something wound around the core of our nation’s history.” And that’s the way he interprets the Civil War. Essentially he’s interpreting it as blood atonement

for the sin of slavery—the national sin of slavery.

I guess I advocate perspective when it comes to this. The question of how to treat slavery and history is never as clear or clean as you would like it to be. If you looked at Stonewall Jackson as a slaveowner, which he was, you can't ignore that he was so much more enlightened than Thomas Jefferson. Three of Jackson's slaves, as I write about in my book, he rescued; people begged him to buy them in order to save them. Another one he gave his freedom to and then when that man got sick, he financed his treatment and recovery, which hardly anyone did....Any way you might want to measure, he was an enlightened slave owner, certainly compared to a lot of U.S. presidents.

ACW: In light of everything that's happened, do you feel differently about Stonewall Jackson? Are you still able to see him as this brilliant strategist, divorced from the ethical perspective that he had and so forth?

S.C. Gwynne: Do I feel differently about Jackson? No, Jackson is just one way of looking at the war and I tried to look at him objectively. In *Hymns*, I spent a lot of time looking at the war through the lens of Black soldiers, which I think is another valid way of doing so. Occasionally, I would run into an interviewer who expected me to devote pages and pages condemning Confederates in my Stonewall Jackson biography. But I was using him as a lens through which to look at history. I wasn't making value judgments and saying, "Yeah, well he was not as bad as

so and so, but worse than so and so." I was trying not to do that.

ACW: In reading your book, it seems that the very success of Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee managed to prolong the war long past the point where the South should have kept fighting. It's a consequence of their brilliance that the South suffered so terribly. Because of what was going on, that was such a great irony to consider.

S.C. Gwynne: I came up with a term for it: the Lee Paradox. The more Lee won, the more the South was destroyed. The more Lee won—or at least did not lose—the more he himself was destroyed. And at the end of the war, we're talking about destruction on a scale of not just Sherman burning his way through Georgia and the Carolinas or Sheridan burning the Shenandoah Valley, but just the economic disaster that the war brought on the South—people starving to death, refugees on the road. The lengthening of the war also unleashed a guerrilla conflict on a scale previously unseen. And prison camps that had never existed before, these ungodly places like Andersonville [in Georgia] or Elmira in New York, a Yankee prison camp that was just as bad as Andersonville.

I'll close with this: Lee's greatest moment to me was after he and his army had been chased westward in Virginia out toward Appomattox. At this point all sorts of people are advocating that the Confederacy, what's left of it, take to the hills and engage in interminable guerrilla war in Virginia that no one could stop. You could take to the hills and do that. Jefferson Davis, his remaining Cabinet

members all advocated for that; a number of Lee's trusted staff officers did so as well. Lee could have said, "We're not going to surrender, just going to keep fighting." And he didn't. He used the full moral weight of his office and his personality to say, "No, we're not going to do that." It would have been just the worst thing in the world for the country if he hadn't.

*To read the complete interview with S.C. Gwynne, go to
bit.ly/HymnsoftheRepublicInterview*

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