

Articles for 10.2018

Sculptor wants a National Civil War Memorial in Taneytown but promises, 'This is not a Confederate monument'

Alex Mann Contact Reporter Carroll County Times



Gary Casteel, a renowned sculptor based in Gettysburg, took it upon himself to create a National Civil War Memorial after discovering that, unlike all of the other major wars the United States participated in, there is no national memorial recognizing this critical moment in American history. Casteel presented his proposal to construct a one-of-a-kind National Civil War Memorial in Taneytown to the city's Mayor and Council Tuesday, Oct. 9.

Gary Casteel, a renowned sculptor and self-proclaimed history lover, has been searching some 15 years for a place to erect his masterpiece-in-the-works: the National Civil War Memorial.

During a time when many places are taking down monuments related to the Confederacy, Casteel may have just found a home in Taneytown for his project, which would honor all parties involved in and affected by the Civil War.

The 72-year-old sculptor, who lives and works in Gettysburg, recently approached

the Taneytown Mayor and City Council proposing a 90-foot monument featuring historical figures from both Union and Confederate states as well as scenes from key moments in the war.

“We learned that there is no national Civil War memorial,” Casteel told the council at its monthly meeting Tuesday, Oct. 9. “Every other war the United States has been involved in has a national memorial.

“My goal, loving the history, placing monuments around the country, is to correct that shortcoming ... to erect a National Civil War memorial.”

And that could align perfectly with the interests of the Maryland city of about 10,000 residents.

Taneytown Mayor James McCarron has been involved with the city's government for 35 years, he told the *Times*. And throughout the three-and-a-half decades “we've tried to figure out ways that we can attract people from Gettysburg to Taneytown because of our Civil War heritage and because of our proximity.

“We've never really been able to come up with a good plan, or one that produced results.”

Casteel's already walked away from several municipalities because they lacked historical significance, space to accommodate what will be a monument of considerable size, and proximity to the famous battleground and the Mason-Dixon Line, he said.

Taneytown might check all the boxes for Casteel's masterpiece.

The city is about 15 miles south of Gettysburg and where Union Gen. George Gordon Meade set up headquarters before the Battle of Gettysburg. If Meade had his way more than a century-and-a-half ago, the Battle of Gettysburg may have been known as the Battle of Taneytown, a historian from Gettysburg College told *The Baltimore Sun* in 2013.

“Taneytown, with a lot of the Union troops coming through that town, plus Meade had his headquarters there, and being located near Route 15, a major highway,” Casteel said, “it makes perfect sense.”

Councilwoman Diane Foster, who was unable to attend the meeting but has since been briefed on the project, agreed.

“In theory it sounds like something, I think, that fits right into the fabric of Taneytown,” Foster told the *Times*. “I just think it would be a great destination stop on the way to Gettysburg. It’d fit right in.”

It’s a monumental prospect for the city and the lifelong sculptor.

Individuals, corporations, states and municipalities across the country have sought Casteel’s services — from Gettysburg to Biloxi, Mississippi.

The National Civil War Memorial, while similar to his previous works that are displayed across the country, is a project of a different caliber — in size and significance — for the 72-year-old.

“It’s similar in the fact that it’s history, it’s Civil War, it has all the uniforms and that sort of thing,” Casteel told the *Times*. “But it’s just larger and more compelling to get it done, simply because of what it can do in the future.”



Carroll County honors its veterans with military monuments throughout the county.

‘Chosen by historians’

Casteel’s proposed monument is circular and would measure 90-feet in diameter. It would feature 10-foot-tall granite walls; north, east, south and west entrances; a symbolic representation of the Mason-Dixon Line and the American Flag flying above Union and Confederate flags, Casteel explained to council.

Each entrance is to be flanked by two life-sized bronze figures of infantry, artillery, cavalry and naval — the units and branches of the military at the time, he said. Casteel plans to surround the complex with the flags of all the states and territories of 1865.

Columns on the outside of the facility would feature one of 16 bronze portraits, about 24 inches in diameter, of civilians who helped to inform future generations about the war and its effect on those who did not fight by leaving behind accounts of what happened, he said.

Inside the facility, similar portraits are planned of 16 military leaders, Casteel said. And in between the military leaders will be 20 event panels illustrating some of the key moments of the war, he added.

Casteel sought input from 30 top American historians, tasking them with selecting the

16 most influential military leaders and civilians.

They chose Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee and Union Gen. Meade, among other military leaders; President Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States, among other political figures; while Harriet Beecher Stowe, Frederick Douglass, Mary Chestnut and Harriet Tubman headline the 16 influential civilians.

“These were the individuals chosen by the historians,” he told council, “not Gary the sculptor.”

And that’s key because the memorial Casteel created seeks to correct the shortcomings he’s seen in most memorials: the absence of a good storyline. The National Civil War Memorial will tell the story of the war from 1861 to 1865 — not a day before or a day after — serving as an educational tool for generations to come, he said.

“The artwork is going to say a lot, especially the scenes,” he said. “That’s what they’re there for.”

But it doesn’t stop there.

“We’re hoping that when we erect this, we would have a visitor center located next to it,” Casteel said. “And that visitor’s center could have guides that would actually take groups of school children around that memorial and explain what these are so they can touch, feel, see and hear what that history is.”

A brick plaza will be in the middle of the memorial, with four allegorical figures of war, hope and deprivation, “that sort of thing,” Casteel told council. “And in the

very center is the most important: Two old veterans in their reunion uniforms sitting on a bench, speaking to the children. That says it all.”

The message of togetherness and unity resonated with Taneytown Councilman Joe Vigliotti.

“To have a monument that not only honors and memorializes our American history, but compels us to look beyond a time when our country was divided, is absolutely needed for this day and age,” Vigliotti wrote in an email to the *Times*. “We’ll always have disagreements. And of course we’ll sometimes be unkind to one another. But we cannot let that separate us from each other, or force us beyond a point of forgiveness. We have too much in common to lose.

“This memorial, in my mind, would help us to remember that.”

‘Not a Confederate monument’

In recent years, specifically after a July 2015 church shooting in Charleston, South Carolina that was racially motivated and the August 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, numerous Confederate monuments and memorials were controversially removed from public property across the country.

In Maryland, Baltimore officials ordered the overnight removal of three memorials to the Confederacy and a statue of Roger B. Taney, the Supreme Court justice who wrote the Dred Scott decision (and is often confused as Taneytown’s namesake) in August 2017. A bronze statue of Taney was also taken down under the cover of night from its 145-year perch in front of the State House in Annapolis that month. Confederate monuments in Ellicott City and Rockville

were also removed that month. There are no public monuments of Confederate figures in Carroll.

Those in favor of their removal argue the monuments many of which were built during the era of Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement, were done so as a means of intimidating blacks and reaffirming white supremacy; those who object to their removal have argued they are part of the country's history.

While some controversial figures like Lee and Davis would be depicted in the memorial, Casteel was clear: "This is not a Confederate monument.

"It is a monument to all Americans and I feel that anyone who would go against this proposal certainly is not looking at the whole picture, simply because this was us," Casteel said. "This was America. This is our history."

The sculptor, in his presentation to council, said he always expects backlash.

"I could plant a rose bush in my backyard," he said. "Someone's not going to like it."

Casteel's project aims to highlight a pivotal point in U.S. history, he said. "This project is to honor the individuals both north, south, east or west, of a period of our history that needs to be remembered."

And that's just how Foster interpreted the proposed memorial.

"I don't think it's a Confederate monument," Foster told the *Times*. "I think it's going to be all encompassing of the Civil War and, probably, what [role] this particular part of the state played in that."

Project's appeal to Taneytown

Casteel's project is especially appealing to the city because it will be funded by the nonprofit organization, the National Civil War Memorial Commission, which will collect individual donations, seek grants and pursue other fundraising avenues to pay for the project.

Bricks that make up the plaza would be sold to people who want to recognize their veteran ancestors' involvement in the war by having their names carved into the building blocks.

And while Casteel has been hard at work creating some of the statues and portraits that are planned to be featured — he sculpts in clay, makes molds and then does a long bronze casting process — no on-site construction or fundraising would occur until the city accepts his proposal and finds, at the very least, a 5-acre parcel for the memorial.

Casteel said that if he had all the funds and a home for the project, he could complete it in about 2 1/2 years. But he sees three to four years as a more realistic time frame.

McCarron acknowledged that much work remains, but highlighted council's positive reception of the proposal and raved about the potential economic boon that could result from such a memorial.

"It would be an absolute answer to a dream," said McCarron, a self-proclaimed history buff.

Foster echoed McCarron's enthusiasm.

"I just think it would be a great destination stop on the way to Gettysburg," she said. "It'd fit right in."

The mayor thinks the city could accommodate the conditions Casteel laid out for the memorial.

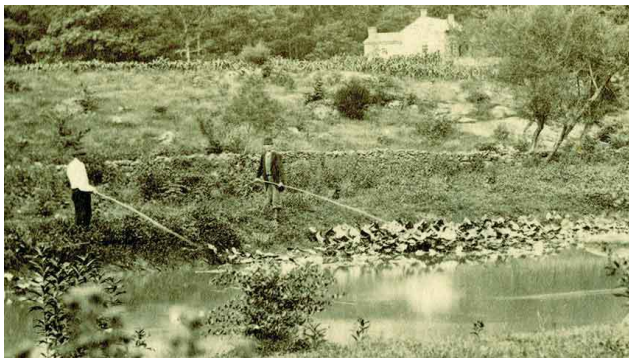
“There’s a whole lot of details that need to be worked out yet,” McCarron said. “We don’t have all the I’s dotted and T’s crossed, but certainly it’s something we want to explore.”

Casteel put it in simpler terms.

“Vietnam, they dug a hole in the middle of [Washington] D.C. and they put in their wall; World War I they put up a 13- or 14-foot statue of General [John J.] Pershing; World War II they built a huge coliseum ... where is the national Civil War memorial?” Casteel asked.

The answer, as it turns out, could be Taneytown.

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In Quieter Times: Fishermen try their luck in Rock Creek, just east of Gettysburg, Pa., on a peaceful day. But even when battle raged near the town in July 1863, soldiers found time to cast a line into local streams.

Gone Fishing: Troops on both sides used improvised tackle to catch fish and supplement their army rations

By Brian E. Stamm

DECEMBER 2018 • [CIVIL WAR TIMES MAGAZINE](#)

The sea and its creatures were of course familiar subjects for most Rhode Island soldiers.

It wasn’t surprising, therefore, that the Ocean State boys of the 2nd Rhode Island Cavalry chose to pass the time with a little “fishing” as they sailed through the Gulf of Mexico to New Orleans in the summer of 1863. Captain William Stevens, of Company C, recalled that his fellow troopers decided to alleviate their boredom during the voyage by tying chunks of meat to strings and throwing the lines over the side of their transport ship, hoping to entice sharks to bite and perhaps grab on for a ride. For the accidental sport fisherman, the pastime would prove unsuccessful. Stevens, however, couldn’t help lament that several of the regiment’s horses had died during the voyage and were thrown overboard. The unfortunate beasts, he noted, provided a veritable “feast” for the finned predators who then had little appetite for the offered bait.

While Stevens and his comrades, attached to the 19th Corps in the Department of the Gulf, tempted fate with sharks to break the boredom, other soldiers during the war would fish to supplement sometimes meager and unappetizing rations, and it was a common activity among troops in both armies. They did so in camp and on the march by using a variety of ad hoc fishing devices. One soldier advocated the



Better Than Salt Pork: A Union soldier takes advantage of a lull in the war to add fish to the dinner menu. (Forbes, Edwin Austin (1839-95)/Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia, USA/Bridgeman Images)

use of a “light tapered pole” or stick on which the line would be tied. Another improvised and used a thin piece of wood shaped like an “hour glass,” about 4- by 1½-inches in size, to make a handfishing tool. A slight concave at both ends allowed the hook and line to be wrapped for carrying. If one of these could not be had, a small stick made a suitable substitute. All the soldier had to do was obtain a hook, some kind of fishing line and bait, and the battle for a wily trout, catfish, or other edible species would begin.

Hooks came in various sizes depending on the type or size of fish desired. Small hooks about a half-inch long were used for trout and other small fish, with larger hooks up to 3 inches long for large freshwater game fish and those of the saltwater variety. Made from a piece of curved stiff wire, one end would be flattened or stamped into a “spade” shape, where the line was tied, and the other end contained a barbed sharpened tip.

Confederate Lieutenant Frank Robertson of Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart’s staff would write home to his wife requesting fishing hooks and lines, if she could find them. In one letter, he drew the specific sizes of hooks he needed that could be used for trout, sunfish, and small catfish. On the Gettysburg battlefield, along Willoughby Run, one enterprising soldier left behind a bent sewing needle used for a hook along with other angling items.

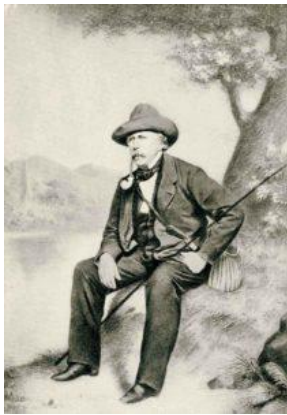
Store-bought fishing lines of the era varied. Typical manufactured lines were made from braided horsehair, braided silk, or a combination of both, which was preferable and more durable. Soldiers in the field would sometimes substitute heavy thread or small cord in case regular line was not available. Commercial floats or “bobbers,” were also available and could be made from any piece of wood, cork, or even sections of dried corncob. The float was then tied on the line above the hook, the distance depending on the depth of the water. Sinkers or weights to send the bait to the bottom and for ease of casting into a stream or body of water were sometimes fashioned by splitting open Minié balls or other lead bullets. Once the bullet was separated, it could be crimped around the line at the desired spot.

Northern soldiers in the field had better access to manufactured fishing items than their Southern counterparts. Newspapers published in the North between 1862 and 1865 ran numerous fishing advertisements, while Southern newspaper ads for fishing tackle during that period were virtually nonexistent. Southern papers, in fact, would not have advertisements for tackle again until after the war.

Bait mostly came in the form of worms or sometimes, according to Lieutenant John Blue of the 17th Virginia Cavalry, “crickets

and bugs” were used to tempt fish. Blue had been part of a mountain company near his home of Romney in western Virginia early in the war and described how he and fellow soldiers fished in mountain streams to supplement their rations. Later in the war, they would cast lines into the headwaters of the Gauley River in Greenbrier County for “trout of which the mountain streams seemed to be alive.”

Other soldiers would substitute whatever was readily available to them. In *The National Tribune*, a newspaper dedicated to soldier submissions after the war, a story featured fictional Private Si Klegg of Company Q, 97th Illinois, who participated in William T. Sherman’s 1864 March to the Sea. Klegg described how he saw a member of his company using “just a hook and line and a piece of pork for bait” to go after catfish. Even though this was a fictional account, Klegg’s adventures were based on actual events.



Angler Thaddeus Norris. (Courtesy of *The American Museum of Fly Fishing*)

Fishing in Wartime

Thaddeus Norris published *The American Anglers Book* in 1864. Though the book was probably not part of a typical Northern or Southern soldier’s reading material, *Anglers*

Book was an indication of how fishing was taking hold as a recreational pursuit for a larger segment of the American population, even as the Civil War continued to grind on. Norris offered advice on how to build and use fishing tackle as well as what techniques were needed to catch both fresh- and saltwater fish. The work even explained the art of fish breeding to the common angler. Norris would further explain that the everyday angler needed a rod, preferably 12 feet in length, the handle made from ash with a hickory, bamboo, or lancewood rod tapered to a metal ring tip with loose ring “eyelets” spaced along its length. Fitted with a metal reel, produced by William Billingham or several other American and foreign makers, the rod could be broken down into two pieces. —**B.E.S.**

Other soldiers also wrote about their attempts and successes while fishing and eating what they caught. While encamped near Beverly, W. Va., along Seneca Creek—known for its abundant population of trout—the 10th West Virginia’s 13-year-old drummer Ransom T. Powell described how he and his comrades did their “best towards depopulating it.” While stationed in Alexandria, Va., J.E. Cutler of the 29th Maine Infantry would write of a huge catfish caught by one of his comrades in the Potomac River that had to be “shared with a friend from the 29th Wisconsin.” The Maine boys, however, were ordered on picket duty, so Cutler and his messmates were unable to sample the fresh catch.

On February 5, 1863, Private Edward O. Austin of the 171st Pennsylvania Militia, writing from the New Bern, N.C., area to his hometown newspaper the *Potter Journal*, cited the “warm weather” and how “The men are occasionally fishing in the river catching eels and catfish.”



Fresh Seafood: Union troops from Florida's Fort Pickens surf fish from Santa Rosa Island in 1861. One Yank has simply tied a line to a stake driven into the beach, and strains as he hauls in another catch. (Heritage Auctions, Dallas)

Catfish, trout, and eels were not the only types of fish soldiers would catch. Other species of fish and water-dwelling creatures would be sought after for both sport and food. E.B. Lufkin of the 13th Maine wrote after the war of being stationed near Lake Pontchartrain in New Orleans and watching fellow company member Jerry Osgood catching a “garfish” more than 5 feet long. Lufkin described the fish as being shaped “much like a pickerel and mottled in the same way but of a different color.” He went on to explain that he and his cohorts were afraid to bathe in the lake as the gar were said to grow 10–12 feet in length, making them more feared than even the local alligators. Corporal Charles Wasage of the 47th New York Infantry recalled that when his unit was stationed on Ossabaw Island at the mouth of the Ogeechee River in Georgia, the men would catch and eat sea turtles that “answered us for fresh beef.”

Alfred Wilson and Mark Wood of the 21st Ohio, two of the raiders who hijacked the Confederate locomotive General during the Great Locomotive Chase in April 1862, experienced similar good fortune. The two were captured in the raid and sent to a Rebel prison near Chattanooga, Tenn. They were able to escape and commandeer a small boat, however, and set out along the

Chattahoochee River, intending to follow it to Columbus, Ga., where Union ships would hopefully be waiting.

After several weeks of subsisting on pumpkin, roots, and raw corn, they came upon some fishing hooks and lines in an empty cabin. Soon they were eating raw catfish, which Wilson described as “palatable.” The escapees eventually reached Columbus where they met up with the Union fleet, but the experience had left both unfit for service. Wilson later said that the acquisition of the fishing paraphernalia had saved his and his partner’s lives.

But fishing for pure survival was the exception to the rule. Most of the soldiers, blue and gray, who baited a hook did so as a way to pass spare time and add variety to their diets. And, as they intently watched their bobbers, fishing helped them take their mind off war’s hardships and kindle memories of quieter days at the town pond or along the stream that ran through their family farm.



William Billingham's patented fly reel. (Courtesy of Ron Gast, Luresnreels.com)

Fly Reels and Rapid Fire

In 1859, William Billingham manufactured what many to consider to be the first American-patented flyfishing reel. The brass reels were designed to mount on the sides of

their rods and were delicate and light to provide the balance needed when precisely casting a small fly lure into a quick-moving trout stream. The Rochester, N.Y., native's main talent, however, was gunsmithing, and he was particularly adept at producing repeating rifles.

In 1861, he teamed with former apprentice Josephus Requa to make one of the first practical machine guns, the Billinghamst-Requa Volley Gun. The weapon consisted of 25 breechloading barrels, which used specialized brass cartridges that could be fired by a single percussion cap. The inventors claimed the .52-caliber barrels, mounted side by side, could spew out up to 175 shots per minute. Billinghamst demonstrated the gun for President Lincoln and was granted a patent for the weapon on September 16, 1862. He was unable, however, to reel in a coveted federal contract during the Civil War for his invention.

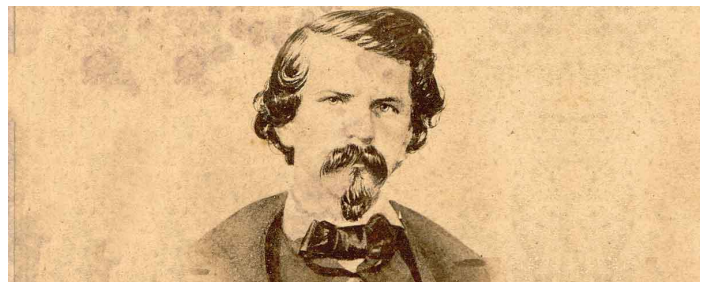
Approximately 50 volley guns were still produced for about \$500 each, and some were deployed by Federal troops against Fort Wagner during the siege of Charleston, S.C. A few Army of the James' batteries used them in the trenches outside of Richmond and Petersburg in 1864. —D.B.S.



“Street Sweeper” Troops of the 18th New York Independent Battery pose in Rochester, N.Y., with one of the Volley Guns they purchased in 1862. The 18th took the weapons to Louisiana, but a shortage of their cartridge ammunition hindered their use. (Cowan's Auctions)

Brian E. Stamm, a retired corrections officer based in Bellefonte, Pa., is currently researching the 2nd Pennsylvania Cavalry.

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Looks that got him killed: Major General Earl Van Dorn's blue eyes, long wavy blond hair, and bushy moustache helped make him a ladies man.

Rambling: Death of a “Frat Boy”

By John Banks

DECEMBER 2018 • CIVIL WAR TIMES
MAGAZINE

Confederate general Earl Van Dorn would hardly recognize the neighborhood central to the story of the end of his life

A skate park, pool supply store, and a rusty chain-link fence that commands little respect surround White Hall, the mansion in Spring Hill, Tenn., where Major General Earl Van Dorn, Army of Mississippi cavalry commander, made his headquarters beginning in March 1863. Although the Civil War-era home of physician and planter Aaron White retains most of its old charm, it clearly needs fresh coats of white paint. Large maples and a massive, ancient oak tree nearly obscure the view of the 1844 mansion from busy Duplex Road. “Private Property, No Trespassing,” warns a small sign near the front door.

A half-mile away, another mansion where Van Dorn also made his headquarters stands atop a slope overlooking Columbia Pike. Built in 1853, it is bordered by a ranch house, a carport, and the rest of the campus of the Tennessee Children’s Home, which owns the nearly two-acre property. Known as Ferguson Hall, the Civil War-era home of Martin Cheairs boasts of nearly 8,000 square feet, four large bedrooms, a magnificent, freestanding spiral staircase, eight fireplaces, and 12-foot ceilings. But it, too, could use a dose of TLC.



An angry husband and father shot Van Dorn dead in Ferguson Hall. (John Banks)

Each mansion is for sale, with asking prices well north of \$1 million. And each has a dark, ugly past: 155 years ago, White Hall was site of the beginning of a scandalous affair between the 42-year-old Van Dorn and a married woman 17 years his junior. Cheairs’ stately home was the site of the general’s murder.

Perhaps no one knows more about Earl Van Dorn than Bridget Smith, author of *Where Elephants Fought*, a historical novel about the twists and turns of his sordid life and death. A 53-year-old Tennessee native, Smith has devoted more than 20 years researching the man she calls a “typical 1860s frat boy.”

A Mississippian who graduated 52nd of 56 in the West Point Class of 1842, Van Dorn was one of the war’s most flamboyant and compelling personalities. He enjoyed poetry and was an accomplished painter and horseman. A Mexican War veteran, Van Dorn was the grand-nephew of President Andrew Jackson, who helped secure an appointment for him at the academy. During the Civil War, he quickly rose from army brigadier general to major general before becoming a cavalry commander. His battlefield results, mostly in the Western Theater, were mixed. In his greatest triumph, Van Dorn’s cavalry forces destroyed more than \$1 million of Union supplies on December 20, 1862, at Holly Springs, Miss., disrupting Ulysses Grant’s operations against Vicksburg, Miss. “He was,” says Smith, “always looking for fame and glory.”

Although Van Dorn and his wife, Caroline—“a girlish-looking little woman” whom he married in 1843 when she was 16—had two children together, the general was far from a devoted partner. He worked overtime to earn one of the all-time great

nicknames, the “terror of ugly husbands and nervous papas.”



The general’s blood may still stain the mansion’s wood floors. (John Banks)

Smith—who is writing a nonfiction companion to *Where Elephants Fought* and working on a movie about the general—has documented Van Dorn’s dalliances. There was the 18-year-old in Vicksburg. And a woman in Texas—a “laundress” probably of, ahem, low social standing—with whom he had three children. For Van Dorn, Smith says, there was “a constant flow of women.”

A reporter traveling with him in 1863 also took notice of Van Dorn’s obsession with the opposite sex, writing of the general’s conversation with a “buxom widow of twenty” in Spring Hill: “After the lively little creature had congratulated him upon his recent success, she closed by saying: ‘General, you are older than I am, but let me give you a little advice—let the women alone until the war is over.’”

‘My God, madam! replied he, ‘I cannot do that, for it is all I am fighting for. I hate all men and were it not for the women, I should not fight at all; besides, if I adopted your generous advice, I would not now be speaking to you.’”

Van Dorn’s constant flow of women ended in Tennessee, 35 miles south of Nashville.

The beginning of the end came at White Hall.

After Joe Ed and Jean Gaddes purchased White Hall in 1992, the couple labored on the antebellum house, saving almost all the original structure. “We’ve worked on this all we could,” says Jean, 76. “We sure would like to see someone buy it who appreciates its history.”

Surprisingly, the couple have never lived in White Hall, instead holding weddings, club meetings, high school reunions, and holiday events in the mansion by appointment only. They relish entertaining visitors with tales of its remarkable past. On the mansion lawn in late November 1864, Nathan Bedford Forest’s cavalymen were served fried chicken by the White family, and the house was a Confederate hospital after the Battle of Franklin. But it’s a visit in the spring of 1863 that drives this story.

Eager to meet Earl Van Dorn, 25-year-old Jessie Peters brushed by Mrs. White and headed for the general’s room on the second floor of White Hall. Peters was the beautiful third wife of George Peters, a 51-year-old doctor, farmer, and politician. Jessie’s visit to White Hall led to gossip of an affair and incensed the Whites, who suggested the general move his headquarters elsewhere. Van Dorn complied, taking his troopers to Cheairs’ mansion nearby. Soon, Dr. Peters got word of the “distressing affair.”



At White Hall the Confederate general reportedly began his affair with Peters' wife, but some accounts claim the cavalry commander was romancing the doctor's daughter. Either way, it was Van Dorn's last fling. (John Banks)

Although facts of Van Dorn's murder remain in dispute, this we know for sure: On the morning of May 7, 1863, in a first-floor room in Cheairs' mansion, Dr. Peters shot the general in the head with a single-shot pocket pistol, killing him. The gunshot apparently was muffled, so Van Dorn's staff outside was unaware the general had been shot until well after the fact. With aid of a pass signed by Van Dorn, Peters escaped, riding a horse through Confederate lines to Union-held Nashville, where he surrendered. The doctor readily admitted his guilt, giving Federal authorities a detailed account of the shooting.

Peters said he told Van Dorn, "If you don't comply with my demands I will instantly blow your brains out." The general, according to Peters, then replied, "You d—d cowardly dog, take that door, or I will kick you out of it." Peters then drew his pistol and fired, recalling that Van Dorn "received the shot in the left side of his head just above the ear, killing him instantly." Peters was never convicted of the killing.

If you believe Van Dorn's staff, the general was "entirely unconscious of any meditated hostility on the part of Dr. Peters." The general's rumored involvement with Jessie? Rubbish, they said. Author Smith believes Van Dorn's affair with a member of the Peters family indeed was the catalyst for the dastardly deed. But her research points to the general's seduction of 15-year-old Clara Peters—the doctor's daughter from his second marriage—as Peters' motivation to commit murder. In another twist to this ugly

tale, Smith has evidence suggesting Van Dorn impregnated Clara, whom the family later had stashed away in a Missouri convent, where she became a nun.



Final Dalliance: Dr. George Peters took matters into his own hands and shot Van Dorn dead on May 7, 1863. (Courtesy of Bridget Smith)

Coverage of Van Dorn's death was mostly slanted toward the allegiance of the publication. "The murder of Gen. Van Dorn," the *Montgomery (Ala.) Advertiser* wrote, "will strike a thrill of horror through the whole South..." But Pennsylvania's *Carlisle Weekly Herald* had the most biting critique of the dead general: "This man was a conspicuous traitor. He had not a particle of moral principle, deceiving alike, friend and foe. He was false to his country, his God, and his fellow men. A violent death was the natural consequence of a life stained all over with violence."

Laura Wayman, a 64-year-old Michigan native, has an intimate knowledge of the room where Van Dorn was killed. From 2003-2005, she lived alone in Ferguson Hall, steps from her job as an administrator for the Tennessee Children's Home. "No," she says unprompted, "I never saw any ghosts." Over the years, the mansion has served as a

military academy, housing for the children's home and a residence for the president of the home. Most recently, it has been used as a venue for special events.

In the murder room, a desk like the one Van Dorn sat at when a one-ounce piece of lead was fired into his brain stands against the far, back wall. In a gold frame, a large painting of the general hangs above a fireplace, on a robin egg-blue-painted wall.

"There's a lot of me in this house," says Wayman, who has filed for funding grants for the mansion and even painted walls of its many large rooms. There may be something of Van Dorn in the house, too. Splotches on the wood floorboards a foot or so from the commander's replica desk appear to be blood. A sliver that was cut from the floor was tested in Nashville. The result: Confirmation of the presence of blood of an unknown male. Perhaps that's only fitting. After all, "Van Dorn," Bridget Smith says, "is quite the mystery." ★

John Banks is author of Connecticut Yankees at Antietam and Hidden History of Connecticut Union Soldiers, both by The History Press. He also is author of a popular Civil War blog (john-banks.blogspot.com). Banks lives in Nashville, Tenn.

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An 1863 lithograph titled "Make Way For Liberty!," designed to encourage African American men to enlist in the Union Army,

and to encourage white Northerners to accept that fact, graphically portrays a USCT soldier bayoneting a Confederate in the face.

Respect Earned Through Blood

By A. Wilson Greene

DECEMBER 2018 • [CIVIL WAR TIMES MAGAZINE](#)

On June 15, 1864, at Petersburg, Va., African American troops captured Confederate forts and defeated stereotypes

Major General William Farrar Smith was a difficult fellow.

"A short, quite portly man, with a light-brown imperial and shaggy mustache, a round military head, and the look of a German officer," Smith, thought Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, was "obstinate" and "likely to condemn whatever is not suggested by himself." In spite of these flaws, Grant brought Smith east from Tennessee and placed him in command of the 18th Corps of the Army of the James. On the morning of June 15, 1864, the lieutenant general assigned Smith primary responsibility for capturing Petersburg, Va., targeted by Grant as the key to reducing Richmond.

Smith's corps contained three infantry divisions, two of them comprised of white soldiers and one of United States Colored Troops. Brigadier General Edward W. Hinks led these two brigades of African Americans, which on that late spring day would experience their baptism of fire. In fact, Hinks' division would begin the combat early that morning by overwhelming a small Confederate outpost at the Baylor Farm, east of Petersburg. This unexpected roadblock,

however, prompted Smith to advance against the main Confederate line with an abundance of caution.

Smith spent most of the day reconnoitering and then positioning his force along a front of more than two miles stretching from near the Appomattox River on his right to Jordan Point Road on his left. He settled on a battle plan targeting a strong point on the Rebel line called Battery 5, opposite the center of his formation. Once this attack commenced, the rest of Smith's corps would join the assault, Hinks' USCTs on the left of the Federal line of battle.

The action began around 7 p.m., and quickly succeeded in capturing Battery 5. The division on Smith's right made limited progress in expanding the breach toward the Appomattox River, leaving it up to the African Americans to demonstrate their combat credentials to the south of Smith's initial breakthrough. Their performance that evening would mark profound chapter in the evolving reputation of black soldiers during the Civil War.



Leaders of a Different Shade: Major General William F. Smith commanded the 18th Corps. (USAHEC)

Hinks implemented Smith's order to prepare a heavy skirmish line about 5 p.m. Colonel Joseph B. Kiddoo of the 22nd USCT had advanced one of his companies in skirmish formation earlier in the afternoon, and when Smith's orders filtered down to Colonel Samuel Duncan's 2nd Brigade of USCT units, Kiddoo received instructions to commit three additional companies, placing all four under the command of Major John B. Cook. Duncan also directed three companies of the 4th USCT under Major Augustus S. Boernstein to join Cook's men in the advanced line. Duncan told these seven companies to "push their skirmishers well to the front and to charge the works as soon as the charge should begin to their right."

A lively exchange of fire ensued, during which the blacks compelled the Confederate sharpshooters in front of the works from Battery 6 southward to fall back toward their main line. When Major Cook spotted Brig. Gen. William H.T. Brooks' 1st Division assault toward Batteries 5 and 6, he ordered his skirmish line to advance as well. Colonel John H. Holman contributed to the attack by committing a portion of the 1st USCT under Lt. Col. Elias Wright on Duncan's right. These soldiers aimed for Battery 6, and along with Hunt's New Yorkers they overwhelmed the defenders there. Holman personally assumed control of two additional companies of the 1st USCT near Jordan Point Road on the far south end of Hinks' combat front. His attempt to reinforce these troops foundered, however, when two companies of the 5th USCT failed to move forward.

Cook's and Boernstein's troops focused on Battery 7. The Confederates responded with blistering volleys and the Federals "seemed to fall like blades of grass before a machine." A New England soldier claimed to have counted 40 or 50 bodies shortly after

the attack, “some on their backs, some on their faces, some on their sides, in all manner of ways, just as they had fallen, with knapsack still unslung from their shoulders.” Undaunted, the determined blacks advanced on the double-quick, inspired by adrenaline-induced cheering. Most of the attackers reached the defilade in front of Battery 7, where Cook ordered the survivors to move to the right and left of the redan and aim for its unprotected rear.



The 3rd Division was led by Brig. Gen. Edward Hinks. (USAHEC)

These raw troops, who had experienced their first serious combat only that morning at the Baylor Farm, promptly obeyed and stormed into Battery 7 from the west, led by Captain Jacob F. Force and Lieutenant William B. Milliken of the 22nd USCT. Two 12-pounder howitzers and one iron gun were among the trophies seized when Battery 7 fell and its garrison “skedaddled.”

Battery 8 loomed southwest of Battery 7 on a knoll separated from the Jordan house plateau by deep ravines to the north and east. It would provide the African Americans’ next target. In keeping with Smith’s general plan of attack, once Duncan’s skirmishers had gone forward and gained success, the

rest of his brigade received orders to join in the offensive. Colonel Kiddoo led the remainder of the 22nd USCT toward Battery 7, but soon realized that his skirmish line had already reduced it, turning his attention instead to Battery 8.

As he shifted his regiment to the south, Kiddoo encountered Lt. Col. Wright and his men from the 1st USCT, fresh from their victory at Battery 6. Wright’s men occupied an abandoned artillery lunette between Batteries 7 and 8 and the two officers consulted on a plan of action. Kiddoo proposed an immediate assault against Battery 8, but Wright demurred, thinking the position too strongly held to storm with the troops at hand. When Kiddoo expressed his determination to advance regardless of the enemy firepower, Wright agreed to support him.



Colonel Joseph B. Kiddoo commanded the 22nd USCT on June 15, and earned a brevet promotion to brigadier general for his actions that day. (Library of Congress)

The 22nd USCT commander left a small portion of his men at the lunette to assist Wright with suppressing the artillery fire spewing from Battery 8, and then led the

remainder of his regiment into the swampy lowland northeast of the Confederate strongpoint. “We charged across what appeared to be an almost impassable ravine,” remembered an officer, “all the time subject to a hot fire of grape and canister until we got so far under the guns as to be sheltered, when the enemy took to their rifle pits as infantrymen. Our brave fellows went steadily through the swamp and up the side of a hill, at an angle of almost fifty degrees, rendered nearly impassable by fallen timber.”

The Confederate artillerists dropped their lanyards, snatched small arms, and mounted the fort’s parapet, from which their musketry could reach the black troops huddled in the defilade now shielding them from artillery fire, pouring “a storm of leaden hail into the head of the column.” Kiddoo admitted that “my men wavered at first,” but they soon rallied when they noticed their comrades of the 1st USCT charging toward Battery 8 from the east. This two-pronged assault worked. The defenders abandoned another artillery piece and scampered to the south, for the protection of Battery 9, while the Federals swiveled their captured 12-pounder to the right and fired at the retreating Confederates. The 22nd USCT paid a heavy price for the capture of Battery 8, losing 11 men killed and 43 wounded.

Brigadier General Henry Wise’s Confederates had now been expelled from Batteries 3 through 8, surrendering or fleeing once the Federals reached their fortifications. The Rebels from Battery 8 were the first to rally after relinquishing their position. Catching their collective breath, the displaced Southerners halted, aligned at right angles to the Dimmock Line, and advanced northward toward the troops of the 1st and 22nd USCT in and around

Battery 8. Kiddoo responded by forming his own line of battle and repelled this brief Confederate counteroffensive, but a lack of ammunition prevented him from following the retiring Confederates into Battery 9. That job now belonged to the 4th USCT, 5th USCT, and 6th USCT of Duncan’s brigade.



New Hampshire native Samuel A. Duncan served as the 4th USCT’s colonel. (Library of Congress)

General Smith had by this time ridden south from Battery 5 to observe the progress of his black division. Appearing in Hinks’ sector “on horseback with one pantaloon leg in his boot, and wearing a straw hat,” Smith instructed Lt. Col. Rogers of the 4th USCT to attack Battery 8, not realizing that Kiddoo and Wright were even then in the process of taking that stronghold. When Rogers discovered that Battery 8 had fallen, he reoriented his regiment to face south and headed for Battery 9, at the junction of the Jordan Point and Prince George Court House roads. At the same time, Duncan found it impossible to arrange his second line, consisting of the 5th USCT and 6th USCT, to follow the skirmishers who conquered Battery 7, so he shifted those two regiments south and deployed them opposite

Batteries 9, 10, and 11. Duncan ordered the 6th USCT, in the front of his formation, to probe forward and test the level of resistance before committing to a full-blown assault.

The 6th USCT marched about half a mile, faced right, and prepared to advance toward Battery 9, immediately in its front. Battery E, 3rd New York Artillery, moved up to provide covering fire. The terrain between their position and the Confederates gave them pause. “Stumps, piles of wood, fallen timber, bushes, and pools” loomed ahead. “As we went forward we came to black burnt logs as high as our breasts, sometimes climbing over them and sometimes going under,” remembered Captain John McMurray of the 6th USCT. “As we neared the battery, or fort, we could see that it looked grim and formidable in the dusk of the evening.” With each step the Federals expected a rain of fire to descend from the Confederate citadel, but inexplicably “all before us was silent as death.”



Petersburg Down Time: Black troops also served in the Army of the Potomac. These men, photographed on August 7, 1864, were in the 9th Corps division of Brig. Gen. Edward Ferrero and were survivors of the notorious July 30 Battle of the Crater. (Library Of Congress)

The men of the 6th USCT reached the moat fronting Battery 9 and began climbing the fort’s steep front slope. “A man would run his bayonet into the side of the parapet, and

another would use it as a step-ladder to climb up,” explained McMurray. “It was getting quite dark, and I felt sure that as fast as a ‘colored troop’ would put his head above the level of that parapet it would be shot off, or he would be knocked back into the ditch; and I fully expected the 6th U.S. Colored Troops, officers and all, to find their death in that ditch.”

McMurray was happily mistaken: Colonel Rogers and the 4th USCT, approaching from the northeast, had already compelled the surprised Confederates to abandon Battery 9 and seek shelter in the next redan to the south. The evidence suggests that the defenders fled without putting up a fight, as no prisoners were taken and another artillery piece fell into Union hands. “Not a shot was fired,” admitted McMurray.



The blue center of the 18th Corps badge indicates it belonged to a member of General Hinks’ 3rd Division. (Private Collection/Photo © Don Troiani/Bridgeman Images)

Rogers moved south against Battery 10 in the fading light, prompting the Confederates to abandon it along with another piece of ordnance. They evacuated Battery 11 near the Dunn House as well. Darkness at last arrested the Federal momentum and Duncan

reorganized his victorious troops around Battery 10, taking precautions against a possible counterattack. It had been a landmark day for Hinks' division. Duncan's brigade alone counted six guns among the prizes taken from Batteries 7 through 11. Duncan reported total casualties of 378 on June 15, embracing the morning action at the Baylor Farm and the evening assaults against the Dimmock Line. Holman's 1st USCT added as many as 156 losses to the equation. A member of Hinks' staff estimated that the division lost 800 men in the evening attacks alone. The blacks undeniably had paid a high price that day, but the first large-scale combat action for these untried African Americans had in a sense transformed them.

William H. Hunter, the black chaplain of the 4th USCT, considered June 15, 1864, "the day when prejudice died in the entire Army of the U.S. of America. It is the day when it was admitted that colored men were equal to the severest ordeal." A white soldier reported that his comrades looked on the works captured by the African Americans with amazement, and "are loud and unreserved in their praise." Assistant Secretary of War Charles A. Dana told his boss, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, that "the hardest fighting was done by the black troops."

In contrast to such laudatory comments, some white Union soldiers in the Army of the Potomac—who had not personally witnessed the fighting on June 15—reflexively discounted the accomplishment of their black comrades. "The works were carried by storm by colored troops" recorded Major Lemuel Abbott of the 10th Vermont, "but they couldn't have taken them if the forts had been fully garrisoned by veterans instead of citizens." Sergeant George Breck, a gunner with Battery L, 1st New York

Light Artillery, was willing to give "due credit to the black soldier for his fighting qualities, but this rendering to Caesar the things that don't honestly belong to Caesar, and extolling Pompey above the white soldier, for courage and dash, valor, bravery and endurance, may delight some of the devoted worshippers of the ebony idol, but we fail to 'see it' ourself."



Captain Charles Dimmock (Courtesy Of The Virginia Museum Of History And Culture)

Built By Slaves

In one of the ironies of the Civil War, on June 15, 1864, Brig. Gen. Edward Hicks USCT troops attacked and conquered several forts of the Dimmock Line that had been built largely by slave labor. The 10-mile long series of 55 numbered forts and gun emplacements that protected Petersburg was named after Captain Charles Dimmock, below, of the Confederate Corps of Engineers. Dimmock began his work on the line in earnest in late summer 1862, and while some Confederate troops worked under Dimmock, most of the physically exhausting manual labor was performed by hundreds of slaves impressed from area plantations.

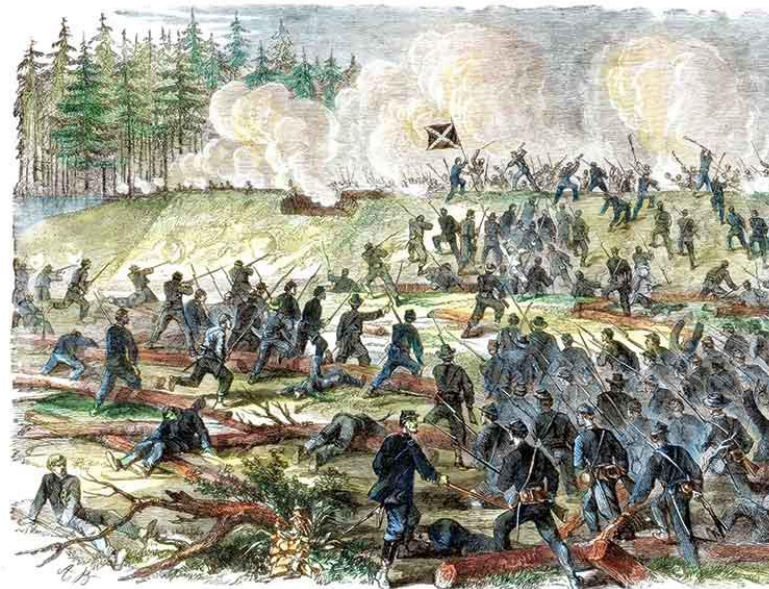


Flipping Real Estate: Some USCT-captured Dimmock Line batteries were reworked and used by the Union. Here, the 12th N.Y. Artillery is photographed in Battery 8. (Afro American Newspapers/Gado/Getty Images)

Their owners, however, protested the loss of valuable labor and the resulting economic hardships, and the Petersburg General Assembly passed a law that established quotas for how many slaves could be impressed at one time and limited their impressments to 60 days. But progress was slow, and Dimmock requested 200 more slave laborers in December 1862, promising they would toil only from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day, and then they would be sent home to their plantations.

Work continued on the line of fortifications until mid-summer 1863, when Dimmock wrote the works were “not entirely completed, but sufficiently so for all defensive purposes.” Some Confederate officers complained the works were not as strong as they could be, but they did allow a scant force of a little more than 2,000 Rebel troops to impede the early June 1864 Union advances on Petersburg and prevent an outright capture of the city. Even after a portion of the Dimmock Line was overrun, some of the forts remained important parts of the Confederate line of defenses for most of the Siege of Petersburg. —D.B.S.

Breck expressed no objection to “our darkly-hued ‘comrades in arms,’ ...rushing into the hottest places of attack...but don’t seek to make him the superior of the American soldier of American or European descent.”

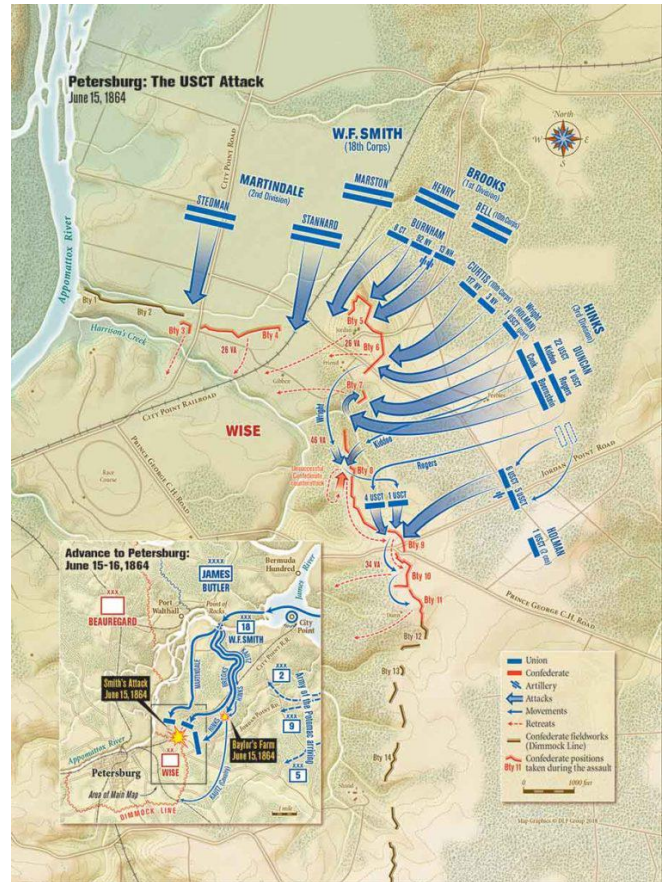


This Close: An engraving depicts 18th Corps’ USCT regiments surging into a Confederate Dimmock Line battery on June 15, 1864. As the map indicates, the Federal assaults initially made good headway against the thinly held Rebel defenses, and Petersburg seemed ripe for the taking. But Federal caution and an influx of Confederate reinforcements brought on the months-long Siege of Petersburg. (The Print Collector/Print Collector/Getty Images)

Revenge for the widely publicized accusations of the murder of black troops at Fort Pillow undoubtedly animated some of Hinks’ African American soldiers as they came face-to-face with their first Confederate opponents. Still, scuttlebutt in the Union camps, such as the account repeated by Major Albert F. Brooker of the 1st Connecticut Heavy Artillery, exaggerated the level of atrocities committed against Confederate prisoners.

“It’s said that a Brigade of Nigars charged the Johnnies as they went in the rebs said give the black sons of bitches no quarter and give them h—& c,” reported Major Brooker. “I am told that it’s just what the nigars did to them, they took no prisoners but 2 and bayoneted every one that was in the Rifle Pitts.”

Such tall tales made the rounds, but evidence does suggest that some surrendered Southerners were killed by their captors and never made it to the rear. William Foster, a hospital steward assigned to the 126th Ohio, asked a black sergeant why his unit had taken so many prisoners during the fighting. The sergeant replied that “our officers were with us and General Grant and Smith were on the field...and we had to do a nice thing.” “You need not ask them of Fort Pillow,” added Foster. “They swear by its sad memory.” An officer in the 22nd USCT explained why the Rebels ran when attacked by the blacks. “The real fact is, the rebels will not stand against our colored soldiers when there is any chance of their being taken prisoners, for they are conscious of what they justly deserve. Our men went into those works after they were taken, yelling ‘Fort Pillow!’ The enemy well knows what this means.”



(Map Graphics © DFL Group 2018)

A Pennsylvania soldier wrote home that he had seen several bayoneted Confederate corpses and assumed that “our colored soldiers remembered their murdered brethren.” Lieutenant Hermon Clarke of the 117th New York provided one of the few eyewitness accounts documenting the execution of Confederate captives. In describing the capture of Battery 6, Clarke wrote his father that the blacks contributed to the victory and had done well. “Some of them came where we were and attempted to kill our prisoners,” Clarke explained. “I didn’t see but one killed....A great bushy Nigger came up to him, knocked him down, and ran his bayonet through his heart. Our boys turned on the Niggers and kept them back.”

The story of a hospitalized black soldier whose wounds on June 15 required the

amputation of his left leg illuminated a noble motivation that trumped the baser instincts of those who were out for blood. A white officer passing through the hospital spotted the black man and said in a jocular tone, “Well, my boy, I see that you have lost a leg for glory.” The amputee looked at his kindly visitor and replied, “No, sir; I have not lost it for glory, but for the elevation of my race.”

A. Wilson Greene is the former president of the Pamplin Historical Park and the National Museum of the Civil War Soldier and the author of The Final Battles of the Petersburg Campaign. This article is adapted from his new 2018 book, A Campaign of Giants—The Battle for Petersburg: Volume One: From the Crossing of the James to the Crater, published by the University of North Carolina Press. Used by permission of the publisher, www.uncpress.org.

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Library of Congress

Cedar Creek/Belle Grove

Sheridan's Valley Campaign, Virginia
October 19, 1864
American Battlefield Trust

In the late summer of 1864, Maj. Gen. Phil Sheridan was given command of the Union Army of the Shenandoah by Grant, with orders to root out the remaining Southern resistance in the Valley and deny the

Confederacy the benefit of the area's food and supplies. From late September to early October, Sheridan's men aggressively burned barns, mills, and crops that could be used to feed Rebel armies. The Confederate force in the valley, Gen. Jubal A. Early's Army of the Valley, had been unsuccessful in slowing Sheridan since the recent Union victories at Third Winchester, Fisher's Hill and Tom's Brook. By mid-October, Early was determined to strike Sheridan. The Confederate army was camped near Strasburg, and the Union men were in camps along the east bank of Cedar Creek. Early executed a surprise attack early on October 19, 1864 and drove first one, then another, then a third Union Corps from the field. As Early paused to reorganize, Sheridan arrived after a dramatic ride from his headquarters in Winchester just in time to rally his troops and launch a crushing counterattack, from which Early's forces could not recover. Sheridan's victory at Cedar Creek extinguished any hope of further Confederate offensives in the Shenandoah Valley, and was one of the Union victories in late 1864 that helped ensure President Abraham Lincoln's reelection that November.

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