

7TH MICHIGAN CAVALRY MORNING REPORT

Headquarters: Bay City, Michigan

Next Up

Liz Stringer entertained us in October with the "Betty Van Lew Story, a Union Spy in Richmond".

On Wednesday, November 11, Gary Wlosinski will tell us the story of the CSS Hunley and how the Confederates created the first practical submarine.

Gary is the Vice President and Program Director of the Ann Arbor CWRT. His presentation was first given five years ago and has been in demand since.

It includes two large models of the Hunley and its predecessor with the Hunley model being partly cut away to display the interior.

Thus, all hands are expected to be on board at 7 bells at the Stein Haus on Wednesday or we will sail without you.

So I emailed again last week and he said although a thousand had been installed this summer, many hundreds more were still on pallets. He said if it was ordered, it was there but it was impossible to know on which pallet.

They are hoping to have their present backlog of tombstones placed by Memorial Day of 2011.

So I said I would contact him in about a year.

I should mention that the cemetery was working through areas replacing deteriorated stones and placing new ones on some graves for the first time.

Where James Birney is buried was not one of those areas. But, because of our request, Jeff took care of getting Birney's stone on their current list. Otherwise, we'd all be dead ourselves before the cemetery placed a stone where Birney is buried.

I guess we are not accustomed to how some things have to be done in the big city.

Update on the James Birney Tombstone Effort

For some time now, we have been attempting to get a government military tombstone placed on the grave of James Birney IV in the gigantic Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, N.Y.

As you may recall, about a year ago I made arrangements for the cemetery to receive and place the stone which we had ordered from the U.S. government.

Green-Wood is an old but very active cemetery with over 560,000 burials including many thousands of Civil War veterans with deteriorating or no tombstones over them.

It is so large that it has its own full time historian, a gentleman named Jeff Richman, who has been very helpful to us.

The stone was expected by last spring so I contacted him then to see if it had arrived and been installed. He said they had received several thousand on still loaded pallets and it would take all summer for volunteers to unpack, locate where each was to go, and place them. He asked if I could email him again in the fall.

The Governor's First Choice:

Orlando B. Willcox

At the beginning of the Civil War, when the first Michigan infantry regiment was directed to be raised by the state, Michigan's war time governor Austin Blair looked to choose the state's most prominent military man to command it.

The choice would be easy. He would be home grown Orlando Bolivar Willcox.

Willcox was born in Detroit on April 23, 1823 and lived there until he was appointed to West Point from which he graduated in 1847 with its class leader, Ambrose E. Burnside.

He served in the Mexican War, fought the Indians on the Kansas plains, and ruined his health in the last Seminole War in Florida in the 1850's.

Discouraged with the difficult living conditions in Florida at the time, he resigned his commission to return to Detroit to practice law in 1857.

The 1st Michigan Infantry was a 3 month unit that was quickly shipped off to Washington in time to participate in the First Battle of Bull Run in July of 1861.

7TH MICHIGAN CAVALRY MORNING REPORT

Headquarters: Bay City, Michigan

By then, he had been given command of a brigade which fought on the left of the Union line in the battle. But, he was shot severely in the arm and was captured shortly afterward during a Confederate advance.

Colonel Willcox was a prisoner in various southern prisons for more than a year until August 19, 1862 when he was exchanged.



Major General Orlando B. Willcox

Less than a month later and by the time of the Battle of Antietam on September 17, 1862, he was a brevet brigadier general and given command of the 1st Division in Ambrose Burnside's 9th Corps.

At Antietam, Burnside's Corps was posted on the left of the Union line along Antietam Creek. On the afternoon of the battle, the 9th Corps crossed the creek and Willcox's division moved unopposed toward Sharpsburg and the rear of Army of Northern Virginia.

But, an order was received from General Burnside halting the movement citing an order from General McClellan to do so because of concern over an expected attack from the left by Confederate General A. P. Hill. The chance of a life time was lost.

By November, Burnside had taken over McClellan's command of the Army of the Potomac and Willcox was in command of the 9th Corps, where he remained throughout the Battle of Fredericksburg.

The middle of 1863 found him in Indiana and Kentucky quelling civil disturbances over the new conscription laws. It was the summer of John Hunt Morgan's raid through Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio and Willcox spent much of his time trying to corral him.

By the fall of 1863, he had rejoined Burnside and the 9th Corps in trying to remove the Confederates from Knoxville, Tennessee.



Willcox in the Field (seated)

The spring of 1864 took him and the 9th Corps back to the Army of the Potomac under U.S.

7TH MICHIGAN CAVALRY MORNING REPORT

Headquarters: Bay City, Michigan

Grant as it prepared for the Wilderness Campaign.

Burnside was in command of the 9th Corps and Willcox took command of the 3rd Division, which included numerous Michigan regiments.

[continue

d]

The 9th Corps was directly involved in all of the fierce battles of the Overland Campaign and by mid-summer, it was before Petersburg.

Burnside was placed in charge of the assault that became known as Battle of the Crater. The disastrous results of the battle were blamed on Burnside for which he was sent on leave and never recalled.

Willcox appeared to be a shoe-in for command of the 9th Corps but Grant gave it instead to a favored member of his staff who never had a field command: General John G. Parke.

Willcox stayed on and his troops were the first into Petersburg on April 3, 1865.

He left the army briefly after the war but then rejoined it as a colonel and served until 1887 when he retired a brigadier general. He was in command of the Army Department of Arizona at the height of the Apache wars. For his efforts, he was awarded the thanks of the Arizona Legislature and had the town of Willcox, Arizona named after him. The Orlando B. Willcox International Turtle Race is held there annually.

Upon his death in 1907, he was buried in Section 1, Grave 18 directly behind the Custis-Lee Mansion in Arlington National Cemetery among other notable Union generals of the war.

For his efforts at the Battle of Bull Run, he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

And, perhaps he would also like to take a look at some papers of the caller's great-grandfather that were found in a long forgotten trunk in the attic.

Having a trip to Washington planned soon, Scott took her up on the offer. He had a high interest in looking at Abbott's things but only a polite interest in the trunk in the attic.

That all changed when he found what the large trunk contained. It was the complete memoirs, journals, and correspondence of Orlando B. Willcox – including dozens of letters from famous Union generals. Apparently the trunk had been unopened since at least his death in 1907.

Willcox had been a prolific writer throughout his life time and it was all contained in the trunk - on mostly high quality acid free paper.

The result of his Washington visit was another book by Robert Scott entitled *Forgotten Valor; the Memoirs, Journals, and Civil War Letters of Orlando B. Willcox*.

Scott had hit the jackpot. Noted Civil War historian Richard Sommers of the U.S. Military History Institute considered the book "one of the most important first-person accounts by a major Civil War officer published in the last one hundred years."

The book, in which Scott considered himself only editing Willcox's memoirs, describes the daily life of a high ranking general in his own words.

Perhaps if Mr. Scott still lives in Grand Blanc, we could have him as a speaker in the future.

Find of a Life Time

In 1993, noted author Robert Garth Scott received a phone call at his home in Grand Blanc, Michigan.

In 1991, he had written a book about Henry Livermore Abbott, a Union major killed during the Battle of the Wilderness. The call was from one of Abbott's descendants wondering if he would like to look at some of Abbott's possessions if he ever was in Washington D.C.

Where to Spend Eternity?

Willcox's choice to be buried at Arlington is not an unusual one. There are 26 Union general officers buried there, along with 15,000 enlisted men - more than at any other cemetery. Notables are Philip Sheridan, Abner Doubleday, Johnnie Clem, Montgomery Meigs, George Crook, Philip Kearney, John Schofield, and many others whose names we would recognize.

Confederates were generally barred from burial at Arlington and for many years the

7TH MICHIGAN CAVALRY
MORNING REPORT
Headquarters: Bay City, Michigan

relatives of the few who were interred there were not allowed to place adornments on their graves.

The only Confederate general buried at Arlington is "Fighting Joe" Wheeler by virtue of his service in the Spanish-American War.

Confederate Generals much preferred Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond, Va.

Twenty-five of them are buried there, as are 18,000 Confederate soldiers, and include J.E.B. Stuart, George Pickett, Richard Garnett, Fitzhugh Lee, "Extra Billy" Smith, and, of course, Confederate President Jefferson Davis.