

On January 7, 1863, Federal General John A. McClernand bitterly wrote to President Lincoln charging Henry Halleck “with willful contempt of superior authority, and with utter incompetency for the extraordinary and vital functions with which he is charged as Genl-in-Chief....Since he assumed the functions [in this position], scarcely anything but disaster has marked the experiences of our arms....How can the country be saved in its dire extremity, with such a Chief at the head of our armies!....Without genius, justice, generosity, or policy, his continuance in command will not only involve continual new levies to fill up our ranks....but must be attended by accumulating disaster....”

Major General Henry Wager Halleck can be described as a paradox. His life and military career were loaded with numerous laudatory personal achievements, yet his personality and questionable actions earned him the reputation of being the most unpopular man in wartime Washington D.C. Acknowledged as one of the Union’s most brilliant officers, he remained one of its most unsuccessful generals. Highly adept at military theory and blessed with admirable administrative ability, Halleck possessed a poor grasp of field affairs and lacked strategic sense which seriously hampered field commanders. His pre-Civil War career was acclaimed as brilliant—a soldier, engineer, teacher, writer, lawyer. Elected to Phi Beta Kappa at Union Academy, he graduated number three at West Point in the class of 1839. He served as an assistant professor at West Point while still an undergraduate and later helped supervise the fortifications of New York Harbor. He also published books on legal and military subjects, served as secretary of state in California, helped write their state constitution, and established himself as the leading lawyer in gold-rush San Francisco. In August of 1861 President Lincoln promoted him to Major General. Ulysses S. Grant acknowledged Halleck’s “gigantic intellect”; William T. Sherman praised his “great capacity” and “large acquirements.” Others, however, reviled him as a “cold, calculating owl.”

In his one attempt at field command at Corinth, Mississippi Halleck, with a 2:1 manpower advantage, plodded and failed to hold his opponent from a leisurely evacuation. Shortly thereafter, Lincoln called him to the capital as General in Chief, prompting one to cynically comment, “Unable to command successfully one army, he was ordered to Washington to command all the armies.” Once in Washington Halleck made instant enemies. Completely lacking in physical attractiveness or charm—pop-eyed, flabby, surly—Halleck was bland, aloof, and often obnoxious. His well-earned nickname of “Old Brains” was replaced by “Old Wooden Head.”

Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles stated that Halleck “originates nothing, anticipates nothing....takes no responsibility, plans nothing, suggests nothing, is good for nothing.” George McClellan proclaimed, “Of all men whom I encountered in high position, Halleck was the most hopelessly stupid. It was more difficult to get an idea through his head than can be conceived by any who never made the attempt. I do not think he ever had a correct military idea from beginning to end.” Secretary of War Edwin Stanton characterized him as “probably the greatest scoundrel and most bare-faced villain in America.” Even Lincoln called Halleck “little more than a first rate clerk [who behaves] like a duck that’s been hit over the head.”

On **MONDAY, FEBRUARY 25** guest speaker Marty Brosnan will present “Henry Halleck, ‘Old Brains’ of the Union Army.” Marty, a past president and long-time member of the MRRT, has given numerous memorable talks to our group. It’s been two years to the month since Marty’s last performance, so circle the date and prepare yourselves for another fine program.

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The Michigan Regimental extends its appreciation to last month's speaker, Dr. Weldon Petz, for his outstanding presentation, "Mary Lincoln: Wife, Mother, and First Lady." As always, Weldon's superlative performance was filled with little-known information and detail. Hopefully, he will continue to lead off our programs in the upcoming year.

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ODDS & ENDS:

- Fall Field Trip: This month we will decide our destination for the Fall Trip. Come to the meeting and express your opinion on this yearly highlight.
- MRRT Web-site: Norm Carver announces that the MRRT Web-site should be up and running by this month. Our thanks to Norm for taking on this endeavor.

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QUIZ: Famous Relatives (Part I) [Identify both.]

1. I was mortally wounded at the stone fence at Marye's Heights when a rifle bullet struck my thigh causing uncontrollable bleeding. My older brother served as Governor, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, as well as a General.
2. After graduating from West Point in May of 1861, I earned a Medal of Honor at First Manassas and later became Governor of Mississippi. My father-in-law, however, won even greater fame. He supported Jefferson Davis for president in the Democratic convention of 1860 (voting for him on 57 consecutive ballots), earned ugly nicknames in Louisiana during the war, and played a large role in Andrew Johnson's impeachment proceedings.
3. At Fort Sumter I served on P.G.T. Beauregard's staff and was one of the three officers sent to try and persuade Robert Anderson to surrender before battle commenced. My wife, however, won greater fame as the Confederacy's best known diarist.
4. From a highly influential Ohio political family, I ruined my own career by issuing Order No. 11 which uprooted thousands of families in four counties in Missouri. I also defended Dr. Samuel Mudd at his conspiracy trial. My foster brother, however, won far greater fame. Before the war he taught at Louisiana Military Academy, but later became the most hated name in the South.
5. My sensitivity and intemperate behavior often irritated my superiors but no one doubted my ability to lead an army. I was killed one week before the war ended when a bullet struck my heart. My wife, Kitty, however, had a brother who won equal fame in a different theater of the war until his death in an ambush on September 4, 1864.
6. As a naval officer I invented a type of gun carried aboard the *Monitor* and later headed the Bureau of Ordnance. My son was killed in 1864 in a highly controversial raid on Richmond supposedly to kill Confederate officials including Jefferson Davis.
7. My fame came as a New England poet, essayist, novelist, and physician. Although I lived through the war, my son won far greater fame. He served as a Captain in the 20th Massachusetts Infantry and once warned President Lincoln of enemy shelling nearby. He was wounded at Balls Bluff, Antietam, and Fredericksburg. He later served on the U.S. Supreme Court for 30 years.
8. I had the distinction of winning two Medals of Honor within a week, however, my brother won far greater fame with his flamboyance and fighting ability. We were both killed at the same battle.
9. My left arm was amputated after a wound at Churubusco in the Mexican War, and I was killed in the Battle of Chantilly. My uncle led a classic military march from Fort Leavenworth to California during the Mexican War before he died of fever a few months later.

10. I graduated from West Point in 1849, fought at Wilson's Creek, and as a Confederate general, was killed in the Battle of Elkhorn Tavern. My brother served as a naval midshipman during the Mexican War, and later as a talented Federal general of cavalry, he had a leg amputated at Third Winchester.

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Handsome, dynamic Colonel Edward E. Cross led the 5th New Hampshire Infantry at Antietam's "Bloody Lane." The red-bearded, bald-headed Cross was an imposing warrior of the first order. Already bleeding from a shrapnel wound to the head, he shouted to his men, "Put on the war paint!" Facing toward him, the Granite Staters witnessed a demoniacal apparition. There stood their leader with his customary red silk handkerchief tied around his head, a mixture of blood, sweat, and gunpowder smeared over his face. Inspired by his example, the men blackened their faces with gunpowder, as Cross bellowed, "Give 'em the war whoop!" Suddenly, the New Hampshire boys charged in, thundering an Indian war cry that gave credence to their state motto: "Live Free or Die." A slugfest ensued which all too closely resembled the sanguinary fight at the Miller Cornfield earlier that morning. Stymied by the Federals, D.H. Hill's Confederates reversed their direction and headed back to the temporary safety of the Piper orchard.

Hard fighting Edward Cross was born in Lancaster, New Hampshire in 1832. He later moved to Cincinnati where he became a newspaperman and then on to Arizona for the mining industry. He fought in at least two duels, one in Arizona with rifles, the other in Mexico with swords. Serving as an officer in the Mexican army, Cross eventually returned to the United States at the outbreak of the Civil War. Some of his men loved him, others despised his outspokenness and tyrannical ways. On June 28, 1863, three days before the Battle of Gettysburg, he had a premonition of death. On July 2 at the Wheatfield he tied a black handkerchief around his head instead of his usual red one prior to leading his men into the hot action. Nearby, General Winfield Scott Hancock shouted, "Cross, this is the last time you'll fight without a star." Cross answered unemotionally, "Too late, general. This is my last battle." Within ten minutes a rifle ball struck him in the abdomen. Moments before he died, Cross uttered, "I did hope I should see peace restored to our distressed country. I think the boys will miss me. Say goodbye to all." One of Cross' men sadly remarked, "if all the colonels in the army had been like him we should never have lost a battle."

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QUIZ ANSWERS:

1. Thomas R.R. and Howell Cobb
2. Adelbert Ames and Benjamin "Beast" Butler
3. James and Mary Boykin Chesnut
4. Thomas Ewing and William Tecumseh Sherman
5. A.P. Hill and John Hunt Morgan
6. John and Ulric Dahlgren
7. Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. and Jr.
8. Thomas and George Custer
9. Philip and Stephen Kearny
10. James M. and John B. McIntosh

Don't forget to be in attendance for "Henry Halleck, 'Old Brains' of the Union Army," as told by Marty Brosnan. It's guaranteed to be an exceptional program. Be at the downtown Farmington Public Library near Grand River and Farmington Road. The meeting starts at 7:30 P.M. Show up early and enjoy the fellowship.....