

“Come on, you Wolverines!” shouted newly-appointed 23-year-old Brigadier General George Armstrong Custer to his cavalry brigade—the 1st, 5th, 6th, and 7th Michigan regiments—at the Battle of Gettysburg. The 1st, recruited around Detroit, was mustered into service on September 13, 1861, with a total enrollment of 1,144 officers and men. The 5th, also consisting of 1,144 men and raised in the Detroit area, became part of the Federal army on August 30, 1862. On October 11, 1862, the 6th, organized in Grand Rapids, was inducted into service with 1,229 men. The 7th, also from Grand Rapids, was initiated on January 27, 1863, with a total of 916 troopers. When the entire brigade arrived in Washington D.C., the 5th and 6th were armed with Spencer repeating rifles at a cost of forty dollars apiece. Also attached to the brigade were six 3-inch rifled guns of Battery M, 2nd U.S. Artillery, whose gunners, highly experienced and professional, were commanded by West Point graduate, Lieutenant Alexander Cummings McWhorter Pennington.

Under Custer’s leadership, the Michigan brigade saw action on July 2, 1863. Ordering Company A of the 6th to charge against what he perceived as a small force of Confederate cavalry, Custer mistakenly led his men into battle with Wade Hampton’s 600-plus veterans. Custer’s horse was shot from beneath him, and the young general came dangerously close to losing his own life. Instead of an easy victory, Custer’s reckless orders cost him thirty-two casualties and heavy embarrassment. The following day, Custer would be less impetuous in his thinking.

On July 3, Custer’s brigade again faced the enemy. Preceding the cavalry charges, the horse artillery units of both sides went into action. Lt. Pennington ordered one of his gunners to silence a Confederate cannon. “I will try,” stated the artillery sergeant as he sighted his piece and fired. The projectile flew so true that it actually entered the muzzle of the enemy cannon and exploded, shattering and splintering the barrel into twisted scrap metal. “Well done,” shouted Pennington, “now try that left gun.” A percussion shell “struck the left wheel and exploded,” according to Samuel Harris of the 5th, “disabling the gun...and [sending] six of the rebel gunners to the happy hunting grounds.” Later the 7th rode at full speed against some fleeing Confederates. As the Michigan boys topped a small rise, however, they ran directly into a low stone wall with a high post and rail fence fixed on top of it. The lead squadrons, going too fast to halt, could not stop in time. “We crashed against the stone wall, which withstood us,” remembered a captain of the 7th, “breaking our columns into jelly and mixing us up like a mass of pulp.” The Rebels now regained the initiative and forced the 7th backward.

Late in the afternoon with the outcome of the fighting still in question, Custer, brandishing his saber, ordered his Wolverines forward, and rode directly at the enemy. The 1st Michigan struck the Confederates so furiously that many horses were turned end over end, crushing their riders beneath them. The collision, “like a freight train crashing,” literally tore parts of men loose from their torsos. But the bulk of the Federals, including the 5th and 7th Michigan, rode on. “For a moment,” reported Custer, “that long, heavy column stood its ground; then, unable to withstand the impetuosity of our attack, it gave way in a disorderly rout, leaving vast numbers of dead in our possession...and I challenge the annals of warfare to produce a more brilliant or successful charge of cavalry.” The Wolverines reported their own casualties as 29 dead, 123 wounded, and 67 missing. “The command perfectly idolized Custer,” wrote Captain S.H. Ballard of the 6th Michigan, “and all felt as if he weighed about a ton.”

On **MONDAY, JULY 29**, we will be treated to a special program entitled, “The Journey,” as presented by long-time MRRT member, Larry Jackson. This talk entails a fascinating antique hunt, involving an unusual, never before told story, of Custer’s 6th cavalry. Larry, a relentless researcher, found some relics at an antique show that set him off on a quest to discover more information. He now reveals how he pieced together this amazing story. Larry obtained his bachelor’s degree from the University of Michigan at Dearborn campus and is employed by the city of Dearborn’s police department as a fingerprint examiner. His talks are always humorous, highly informative and entertaining, delivered in a unique style. You’ll definitely want to be in attendance for this one. It promises to be a great evening.

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The MRRT wishes to thank last month’s speaker, Dr. Ralph Gordon, for his fine presentation of “John Hunt Morgan’s Indiana-Ohio Raid: Lark of Renegades or Psychological Warfare on the North?” Dr. Gordon’s slides, taken along Morgan’s 1000-mile route, revealed numerous places essential to the story of the raid.

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QUIZ: All questions pertain to George Custer.

1. Which two other officers were promoted to Brigadier General with Custer on June 29, 1863?
2. At which two battles, fought less than a week apart, did Custer's brother, Tom, win two Medals of Honor?
3. Which two of these notable Indians were not involved in the massacre at the Little Big Horn River? A) Black Kettle B) Sitting Bull C) Gall D) Quanah Parker E) Little Big Man F) Crazy Horse
4. In Custer's last year at West Point, what was his best subject? His worst subject?
5. Which two of these horses were not ridden by Custer? A) Custis Lee B) Lady Luck C) Wellington D) Don Juan E) Roanoke F) Skylark G) Vic
6. Which Federal general did Custer say "he would follow...to the ends of the earth"? And, which general did Custer boast, "I do not believe a father could love his son more than [he] loves me"?
7. At Gettysburg which colonels commanded Custer's 1st, 5th, 6th, and 7th regiments of cavalry?
8. Which old West Point friend did Custer defeat at Tom's Brook and what did the Federals dub this Confederate rout?
9. Which famous foreigner did Custer lead on a buffalo hunt in January of 1872? And, which noted scout assisted in this expedition?
10. Which two of these landmarks were not a part of Custer's fighting on July 3 at Gettysburg? A) Rummel Farm B) Two Tavern's Road C) Cress Ridge D) Plum Ridge E) Hassler's Spring F) Low Dutch Road

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FALL FIELD TRIP:

With nearly 50 folks signed up for the Shiloh trip, we still have room for a few more. However, you must sign up soon to be a part of this. Please bring a check to this meeting [made out to either Carroll Tietz or Jerry Maxwell] for the amount of \$45. This will cover the bus fee, park entrance costs for the bus, guide's fee, bus driver tip, etc. Another check for lunches and Saturday night dinner will be collected at the next meeting.

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A tragic tale from the Battle of Shiloh...

Forty-one year old Brigadier General William Harvey Lamb Wallace commanded the Second Division of Ulysses S. Grant's Union Army of the Tennessee. Born in Urbana, Ohio, Wallace moved with his family as a small boy to La Salle County, Illinois. Admitted to the state bar in 1846, he volunteered as a private a year later during the Mexican War. After displaying courage in a number of engagements, W.H.L. Wallace rose to the rank of first lieutenant. Following the war he returned to Illinois and practiced law until the outbreak of the Civil War. During this interim, Wallace fell in love with Ann Dickey, who was 12 years younger, and soon after her eighteenth birthday, they married. At the time of the Battle of Shiloh, Ann remained home in Illinois with their 9-year-old daughter.

W.H.L. Wallace often sat by candlelight and wrote his wife telling her how much he desired that the war end so he could return to her. Longing for his "quiet, pleasant home," he called it "the place of all others on earth the most desirable." In another letter penned on March 8, he told his wife of a severe illness he had sustained, and that he had prayed for the "strength and wisdom to enable me to do my whole duty toward the country in this her hour of peril." In the first week of April he wrote, "I trust in God that it may not be long ere we are again united..." Sensing his sadness and fearing for his health, Ann decided to surprise her husband with an unsuspected trip to Pittsburg Landing. "I knew he would not think it consistent with his duty to send for me," she later wrote, "though I found it mine to go to him."

Ann arrived by steamboat on the Tennessee River at Pittsburg Landing on the night of April 5—her trek still unknown to her husband. The following morning Ann readied for the trip to her husband's headquarters when the noise of heavy shelling arose in the distance. As the sound of battle heightened, Ann had no other alternative than to sit and pray, not only for her husband but other relatives—her father, two brothers, and two of her husband's brothers—who were also with the Federal army at Shiloh. "That long day on that steamboat," Ann remembered, "its scenes and sensations are beyond any description." Hundreds of wounded men were hurriedly brought to the steamboat, and for awhile Ann helped by carrying water and

bandages. She remained in awe of the “brave and uncomplaining soldiers—still, waiting their turn, as the overtaxed surgeons went their fearful rounds.” As the hours passed, she continued to agonize about her husband’s safety.

In the afternoon W.H.L. Wallace’s Second Division held its ground in a sunken road soon to be called the “Hornet’s Nest.” For six hours the Federals held this area against intense attacks of the Confederates, but finally Wallace ordered a retreat. While riding with his brother-in-law and aide, Lt. Cyrus Dickey, Wallace rose in the stirrups for a better view of the advancing enemy. Seconds later, Wallace uttered a short, agonized groan, jerked upward in the saddle, and fell on his face to the ground. A musket ball had struck him just above and behind the left ear, slanted through the skull, and passed out the left eye socket, destroying the eye in its path. The gaping wound convinced Dickey and the others nearby that Wallace was dead. Some orderlies carried his body a distance before leaving it with Cyrus Dickey. As pursuing Confederates neared, Dickey dragged the body to the side of the road and placed it beside several ammunition boxes. Dickey then fled as well.

That night Ann learned of her husband’s death. “I was stunned, chilled, almost paralyzed!” she recalled. Her brother, Cyrus, soon boarded the steamboat with the awful details. Throughout the night Ann bolstered her courage by attending to the wounded men on the vessel. The following day at 11:00 A.M. Cyrus returned to the place he had left W.H.L. Wallace the day before. To his amazement he found Wallace still breathing. Passing Confederates had wrapped him in a blanket, but he remained wet and cold from the previous night’s rainstorm. When Cyrus informed his sister of her husband’s condition, Ann was overjoyed. She hurried to his body and rejoiced that a “miracle” had kept him alive. “Will recognized my voice right off and clasped my hand,” she wrote. “He knows me,” she exclaimed, but others, seeing his horrible condition, denied it. With great difficulty, Wallace moved his lips and whispered, “Yes.” Later that afternoon Wallace was transported to Grant’s headquarters, the Cherry Mansion, in Savannah. He was placed on a sofa in the library. “His pulse was strong and healthy,” wrote Ann, “[and] we could not but hope that he would recover.” For three days Wallace languished as his wife sat by his side, hoping for signs of encouragement. Finally, on Thursday, April 10, fever and inflammation set in. For nearly three hours Wallace suffered much pain and became delirious. Finally regaining consciousness, Wallace pulled Ann’s head to his lips and whispered, “We meet in Heaven.” Within hours he died. His body was later sent to Ottawa, Illinois for burial in a private cemetery.

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QUIZ ANSWERS:

1. Elon Farnsworth and Wesley Merritt
2. Namozine Church and Sayler’s Creek
3. A) Black Kettle and D) Quanah Parker
4. Artillery tactics (best) and Cavalry tactics (worst)
5. B) Lady Luck and F) Skylark
6. George McClellan and Alfred Pleasonton
7. 1st: Col. Charles H. Town; 5th: Col. Russell A. Alger; 6th: Col. George Gray; 7th: Col. William D. Mann
8. Tom Rosser and “Woodstock Races”
9. Grand Duke Alexis Romanov and “Buffalo Bill” Cody
10. D)Plum Ridge and E) Hassler’s Spring

Don’t forget to be on hand for Larry Jackson’s presentation, “The Journey.” It’s one you certainly won’t want to miss. Mark your calendar now: **MONDAY, JULY 29**. The business meeting commences at 7:30 P.M. at the old Farmington Library at Grand River and Farmington Road. See you there....

And don’t forget to try our new website: <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt/>.