

On The Skirmish Line

The Newsletter of the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust

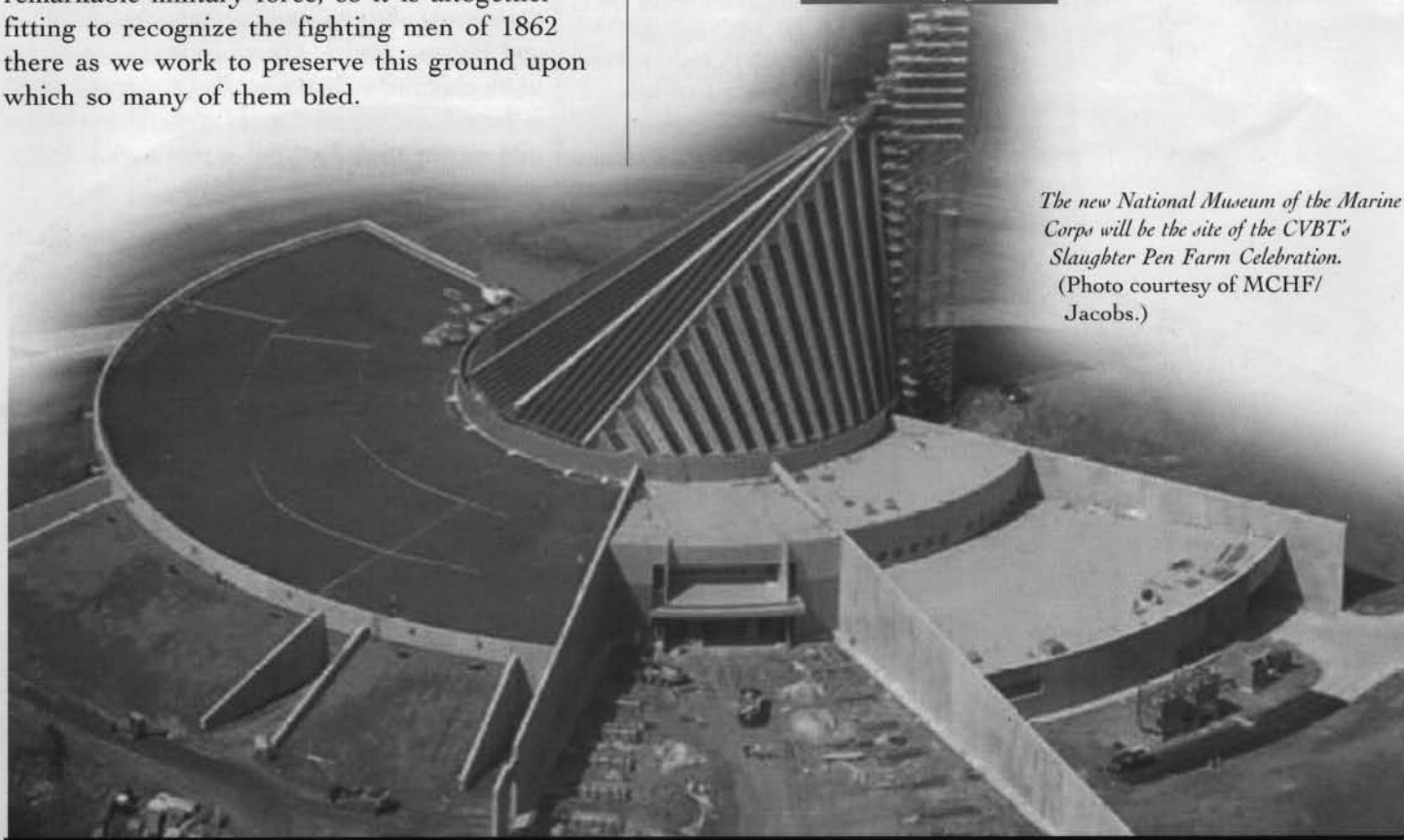
An Invitation to Honor and Preserve the Legacy of Those Who Fell at the Slaughter Pen Farm

Fundraising for the Slaughter Pen acquisition is in full swing. Many of our members have responded generously and we thank them. As we press on to meet our goal of \$1 million, we are planning a special event at the National Museum of the Marine Corps. There were no Marines at the Slaughter Pen on 13 December 1862 (we checked), but this new museum near the Marine Corps base at Quantico is a powerful monument to fighting spirit, valor, and sacrifice. These qualities are ingrained into young Marines, to become shared virtues of a remarkable military force, so it is altogether fitting to recognize the fighting men of 1862 there as we work to preserve this ground upon which so many of them bled.

The Marine Corps Heritage Foundation and the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust will host this event at the National Museum of the Marine Corps, to celebrate the preservation of the Slaughter Pen farm on the Fredericksburg battlefield. Attendance will be limited, so be sure to respond to your invitation as quickly as possible. If you want to respond before you receive your invitation, you can go to our website, www.cvbt.org, and sign up immediately. The cost is \$100 per person, or \$175 per couple.

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The new National Museum of the Marine Corps will be the site of the CVBT's Slaughter Pen Farm Celebration. (Photo courtesy of MCHF/Jacobs.)



From the Archives

The following excerpts are from a letter from a soldier in the 26th New York Regiment (a unit in which two men would be awarded Medals of Honor for their actions on 13 December 1862). The writer is Enoch James, an immigrant from Wales. In fact, the original letter is in Welsh and first appeared in a newspaper there called *Y Gwladgarwr (The Patriot)*, on 17 January 1863.

*Hospital Tent on the Rapahannock (sic),
December 14, 1862*

Dear Parents,

I am now taking my pencil in hand to write a few lines to you to let you know what has been happening.... [W]e left our old camp in Brook's Station last Tuesday morning. It was remarkably cold and the earth was frozen solid; the road was hard and rough. We went forward two miles and camped for the night. [A]bout the middle of the night we got an order to move at dawn so we had to start right away. We went about three miles, and stopped for the night in a wood about three o'clock in the morning, and then we started a second time, this time to cross the river, about three miles further at dawn; but the pontoon bridges weren't ready, so we had to stay there the whole day and night.

We went over the river around 9 o'clock in the morning, and spent the entire day getting the soldiers to places closer to the enemy as possible. We had camped along the railroad from their lines and had hidden ourselves in the woods out of sight, but their forces and ours were in sight of each other in a field, which was broken. There were about 700 yards

between us but we didn't start firing on each other. We lay down on the spot this night again and it was a cold night also. And in the morning we were up and ready at five o'clock. This was on Saturday. Our corps was moved forward to the place where their troops were the day before and the soldiers fired on each other the entire time. As soon as they saw us move forward in one line, they opened fire with a bombardment of grape shot. We then went forward 500 yards towards them and lay down. The shot and shell continued to wizz around us killing two and wounding four in our regiment. We were lying there in the mud because the sun had risen hot and melted the ice until the place had become too muddy for us to lie down until two o'clock in the afternoon when we went forward to the woods in two lines. Here our general (Gibbon) made a terrible mistake, ordered us to go forward a few lines into the woods and stood and started to fire. We did this by walking up in the face of the deadly fire on the enemy from their muskets. We stood in the place we needed to be and started on our work. The rebels had hidden from sight in the woods and by the side of the railroad, 80 feet from us. We weren't there for 10 minutes before my company broke up. I was in command since our captain was absent. Six of our company were killed and 15 were wounded. My orderly sergeant was shot in the chest and will not live. Tom Evans was shot in his side and will not live. 21 of the 55 who went in with me were shot. I got shot in the top of the knee and the bullet came out.

The confusion of battle is evident in this account, but its aftermath also received attention:

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Slaughter Pen Farm Acquisition Provides Access to Five Medal of Honor Winners

The Slaughter Pen has proved to be a real preservation coup. The terrain is little changed since 1862, which allows historic interpretation with exceptional accuracy. In addition, the preserved ground includes the sites where the actions of five individuals would eventually be recognized through Congressional Medals of Honor.

In the 2003 volume of the Trust's scholarly publication *Frederickburg History and Biography*, one of our board members presented a study of Medals of Honor awarded for individual acts of bravery on the area's four battlefields. The records showed that there were two periods during which such decorations were awarded. The first period was during the war (of course) as the government sought to recognize and instill fighting spirit. The second phase occurred several decades after the war, when aging veterans began to gather in reunions and remember the fiery ordeal of their youth.

The five Medals of Honor awarded for action at the Slaughter Pen were awarded during this latter period, but the memories of war were clearly still vivid. The veterans were also inclined to recognize sacrifice and loyalty to comrades under fire

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Slaughter Pen

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Our featured guests will be General Richard B. Myers, USAF (Ret.), former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Edwin C. Bearss, Historian Emeritus of the National Park Service. The evening will consist of an enticing array of food and drink, remarks from both General Myers and Ed Bearss, and, of course, an opportunity to explore this museum which will open to the public later this year. Do join us for this once in a lifetime event.

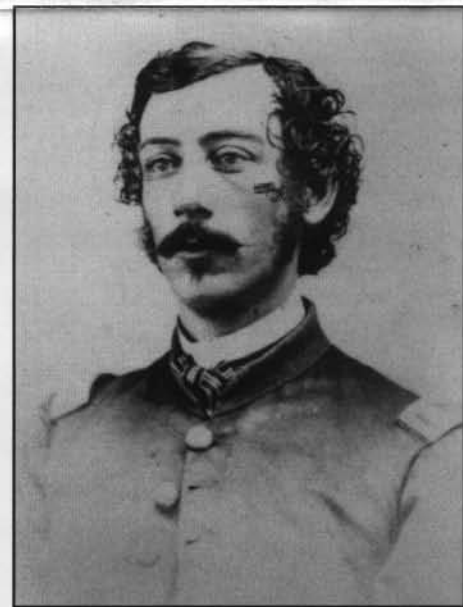
rather than the government's more pragmatic need to encourage young soldiers to seek glory.

The citations are instructive. Private Martin Schubert, of the 26th New York Infantry, "relinquished a furlough granted for wounds, entered the battle, where he picked up the colors after several bearers had been killed or wounded, and carried them until himself wounded again." Private Joseph Keene, also of the 26th New York, "[v]oluntarily seized the colors after several color bearers had been shot down and led the regiment in the charge." Private Philip Petty, of the 136th Pennsylvania Infantry, "[t]ook up the colors as they fell out of the hands of the wounded color bearer and carried them forward in the charge."

Private George

Maynard, of the 13th Massachusetts Infantry, did not get recognized for similar heroic actions, but his award exemplifies the spirit of loyalty to comrades that the old veterans found important. Private Maynard, "[w]ent 250 yards in front of his regiment toward the position of the enemy and under fire brought within the lines a wounded and unconscious comrade."

Interestingly, the citation for the only officer to be recognized with a Medal of Honor on that field is a bit perfunctory. The documentation for Colonel Charles H. T. Collis, commanding the 114th Pennsylvania Zouaves, simply says that he, "[g]allantly led his regiment in battle at a critical moment." Collis had already been brevetted to Brigadier General and to Major General, so perhaps an



Private George Maynard, one of the five recipients of the Medal of Honor awarded on the Slaughter Pen Farm. (Photo courtesy of the Army War College.)

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*Membership
Categories*

Annual Member
\$35

Active Member
\$135

Sustaining Member
\$250

Patron
\$500

Benefactor
\$1,000

Life Member
\$5,000

Life Patron
\$10,000

Corporate Member
\$500

Corporate Patron
\$1,000

From The Archives

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[We] are in one tent on some grass but we are in good care (Sam is here serving us). They have buried 14 men here today and some who died were brought here; one of them was from our company. They have just taken out a full barrel of legs and arms to bury and some of these were cut off in this house; this is also full of men who have been wounded and the earth had been covered with them and some of them were screaming from pain. The Regiment has come through a dreadful time....

After General Gibbon got his orders, the division went into the woods forcing the rebels out; but as no support came up and we had gone out of the line of battle, we had to come out of there. So the army today is on the same ground where they were yesterday. There wasn't any fighting today but there was some cannon fire and shooting between the lines.

Monday: 15 December

Ten men died here from their wounds last night. My

Orderly Sergeant died last night. They just carried outside a full tub of arms and legs to bury, some of these were cut off last night. I don't think the Adjutant is alive...

Medal of Honor

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effusive narrative might have been thought to be in poor taste.

Another characteristic of these awards jumps out when they are viewed collectively. They are representative of the tremendous wave of immigration that occurred during the 1840s and 50s. Private Schubert was from Germany. Privates Keene and Petty were from England. Private Maynard and Colonel Collis were Irishmen. The Union army was full of European immigrants fighting for the survival of their adopted nation. The Slaughter Pen farm truly exemplifies the American experience of the early and mid nineteenth century.



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