



The Unknown Hero from the Class of '56

By Cathie Morgan, Editor

Born at Norwich, Vermont over 150 years ago, Edward Bancroft Williston still receives accolades as one of Theta Chi's most renown recruits. However, his name wasn't exactly common knowledge among other circles until a group of Norwich alumni, who also came of age during a time of war, joined together in an effort to educate and inspire. The Class of 1970 Reunion Committee wanted to leave their mark at their alma mater.

Their plan was to commission a painting of a fellow alumnus whose conduct represented the values of their institution—a gift to inspire further generations of students. They wanted their gift to embody the Norwich motto, "I Will Try."

The person whom they chose for the honor was, however, not from their class. He was E.B. Williston, from the class of '56...1856, that is.

As a recipient of the Medal of Honor, the nations' highest military honor, Brother Williston's name was suggested, but little was known about him. So an effort was launched to learn more about the man.

What they found was the little known story of a hero.

The Reunion Committee commissioned well-known Civil War artist, Dale Gallon, to make their vision a reality. Gallon's paintings, praised as history lessons on canvas, are displayed at the Pentagon, the U.S. Army War College and the Minnesota State Capitol. Known for his attention to detail and historical accuracy, Dale Gallon was assisted by staff historian, Bob Poirier, and a team of researchers in uncovering telling details of Brother Williston's bravery under fire.

"The subject matter became more real when we tried to ascertain what Williston did to earn his Medal of Honor," said Giff Slater, Reunion Gifts Officer with the Institutional Advancement Office at Norwich University, who helped coordinate the project. "As we tried to understand more about him, we found out some things that the Norwich community didn't know before," he said.

Edward B. Williston, Commander, Battery D, 2nd U.S. Artillery, received the Medal of Honor for "distinguished gallantry in action" while engaging the 4th, 5th and 6th South Carolina Cavalry of General M.C. Butler in a battle that took place on June 11–12, 1864. The action occurred during a two-day Civil War battle at Trevilian Station, Virginia, where an estimated 1,600 Confederate and Union Soldiers lost their lives.

Much of what is known of Brother Williston's actions during the battle comes from Brigadier General Wesley Merritt's official report of the incident. "Right gallantly did the battery come up in the midst of heavy musketry fire," Merritt wrote. "We being at that time so close to the enemy that their shells all flew far over us." The report goes on to state, "Planting three guns of the battery in this position, where it dealt the enemy heavy blows, Lieutenant Williston moved one of his brass 12-pounders onto the skirmish line. In fact, the line was moved to the front to allow him to get an eligible position, where he



remained with his gun, in the face of the strengthened enemy who advanced to its very muzzle dealing death and destruction in their ranks with double loads of canister."

Bob Poirier '66, a retired intelligence officer, Civil War expert and published author, led the research team that uncovered telling details of Williston's bravery under fire. "If you can picture the battle field, here is Williston moving a single gun forward—right up to, if not ahead of, the troops he is supporting," Poirier explains. "He's an American hero."

Brother Edward Bancroft Williston continued his service to his country progressing up the military ranks until he retired July 15, 1900.



He was advanced to the rank of Brigadier General while on the retired list by an Act of Congress on April 23, 1904. He made his retirement home in Portland, Oregon and passed away April 24, 1920. Williston is buried in Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia with his wife, Flora E. Chatfield Williston (September 26, 1861–December 24, 1944).

The print, For Distinguished Gallantry, depicts Williston directing the fire of his forward placed 12-pound Napoleon cannon. The original was unveiled at the Partridge Society and Class Reunion Luncheon September 16, 2006 at the Kreitzberg Arena of Norwich University and now hangs in Jackman Hall, the Medal of Honor Room.

Interested in owning a print?

Arrangements have been made for a Norwich limited-edition print to be produced from the original oil painting. This “Norwich only” edition print will be signed by the artist, certified and numbered. The Norwich regimental crest and a University Partridge logo with Centennial stairs will appear in the lower margin. The actual image of this print will measure approximately 16x22 inches. A printed brochure providing a full description of the battle scene and action of the main participants will accompany each print. No more than 304 of the prints will be prepared.

Proceeds derived from the sale of the print will be used to enhance the Norwich historical heritage by purchasing the Dale Gallon oil painting for the new Gordon Sullivan Museum and History Center.

Copies of the print, which will bear the distinctive Norwich cadet regimental crest, may be purchased from the Norwich Advancement Office for \$175 (unframed) with \$20 shipping. Framed editions may be purchased for \$350 plus \$55 shipping costs east of the Mississippi and \$85 west of the Mississippi.

Signed limited edition prints are also available without the Norwich cadet crest.

To order, please email Giff Slater at gslater@norwich.edu or Kristin Fontaine at kfontain@norwich.edu

Order requests may also be mailed to:

Giff Slater
Office of Institutional Advancement
Norwich University
158 Harmon Drive
Northfield, VT.

Or, visit the web site to download the order form at <http://www.norwich.edu/about/pdf/willistonOrderForm.pdf>

After 41 years, a Brother's love letters bring him home.

By Cathie Morgan, Editor

Most of us these days are familiar with the popular TV series, CSI. We watch and marvel at fictitious crimes solved through scientific analysis of carpet fibers, bullet striations, and 3-D skeletal recreation.

This, however, is the true story of a brother in Theta Chi, Colonel Charles J. Scharf, (Gamma Theta/San Diego State '54) who was returned to his loved ones through the miraculous use of DNA.

On October 1, 1965, Captain Charles Scharf and his company of three F-4C Phantom II fighter planes were assigned to road reconnaissance. Their mission was to attack an enemy concentration and a major highway in North Vietnam. Hit by enemy fire on the third bombing run while leading two others in his flight, Brother Scharf's radio communication recorded his “Mayday” call and the return broadcast from a fellow pilot advising him to bail out due to fire in the rear of his aircraft. Scharf's plane began to disintegrate and a parachute was seen leaving the aircraft. The other two planes lost sight of his parachute, and, despite circling for ten minutes where Scharf's aircraft crashed, no radio or visual contact was ever made again.

Captain Charles J. Scharf was officially listed missing in action.

In January 1990, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (S.R.V.) provided information to the U.S. officials indicating two men were buried near their crash site, but that one had been washed away during flooding. Within a month, a joint U.S.-S.R.V. team, led by the Joint POW/ MIA Accounting Command, interviewed three witnesses to the crash and located scattered wreckage at the site. The 1992 excavation of that site yielded human remains, a dental prosthesis, and numerous personal effects, including the rank insignia of Scharf's fellow crewman. A second joint excavation in 1992 recovered additional artifacts, but no remains.

A third excavation in 2004 recovered additional evidence including pilot-related life support artifacts, a metal captain's insignia (Scharf's rank at the time) and a plastic denture tooth.

Along with dental records, other forensic tools and circumstantial evidence, scientists from JPAC and the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory also attempted to use DNA from a known maternal relative to establish the identification. However, the tests were inconclusive.

Military scientists recently compared the bone recovered in a North Vietnamese jungle where the Air Force pilot's plane went down 40 years ago to saliva on letters he had sent his wife. It was a DNA match, they announced. At last, they said, the remains of Colonel Charles J. Scharf had been found.

The bone identified as Charles J. Scharf, the other items from the crash site, a uniform complete with badges and medals, as if he were wearing it, were buried at Arlington National Cemetery on November 30th, 2006.

Also placed in the coffin were the love letters that brought him home.



TOP: Members of an Air Force Honor Guard carry the remains of Colonel Charles J. Scharf, of San Diego, past his widow, Patricia Scharf. LOWER: An Air Force bugler plays taps during the funeral services for Col. Charles J. Scharf, of San Diego, Thursday, November 30, 2006 at Arlington National Cemetery.