

The Dead of Eltham's Landing

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The Battle of Eltham's Landing, also known as the Battle of West Point, was fought in New Kent County, Virginia, on May 7, 1862. The engagement resulted when Union troops made an amphibious landing at Brickhouse on the York River in an attempt to fall upon the flank of Confederate units withdrawing toward Richmond from their lines at Yorktown. Before the Union forces were able to concentrate at Brickhouse, Confederates took the initiative and attacked on the morning of May 7. Having achieved the objective of protecting their route of withdrawal and unwilling to advance farther into the range of Union naval guns firing from the York, the Confederates broke off their attack in the early afternoon. The Union forces maintained their positions around Brickhouse Landing and awaited reinforcements before resuming their pursuit.

By Civil War standards, Eltham's Landing was a small battle, with no more than division-sized formations on either side. Long-accepted estimates of casualties, dating to the late nineteenth century, report the deaths of 48 Union and just eight Confederate soldiers in this conflict. Union soldiers killed in the fighting were buried at Brickhouse Landing. Some of the wounded died while being transported down the York River to Fortress Monroe; others died at the hospital on that post or in other hospitals to which they had been transferred. Confederate soldiers who were killed in action were buried on the battlefield, either by their comrades or by Union troops who discovered their bodies on the day following the battle. As in the case of their enemies, some wounded Confederates died en route to hospitals or while under medical treatment in Richmond.

Between 2011 and 2013 the author researched regimental muster rolls, unit histories, and personal memoirs related to the Union and Confederate troops that participated in the Battle of Eltham's Landing. Additionally he consulted contemporary newspaper accounts, federal hospital and burial reports, and the records of national and private cemeteries to compile a clearer picture of the human losses in this battle. He discovered that the mortality statistics accepted for more than a hundred years understate the number of deaths at Eltham's Landing. This finding concurs with a larger census-based study of Civil War deaths produced by J. David Hacker of the State University of New York at Binghamton in 2011.¹ It is now clear that factors other than incomplete or missing records contributed to the undercounting of casualties. Political pressure to underreport deaths, especially on the Confederate side, may have had an influence on the inaccurate number of southerners claimed to have been killed at Eltham's Landing.

The compilation that follows makes no claim to be the final word on the dead of Eltham's Landing. As Hacker has observed, "Many men who died in or as a result of the war left no trace in the

¹ J. David Hacker, "A Census-Based Count of the Civil War Dead," *Civil War History* 57:4 (December 2011), 306–347.

historical record. No effort on the part of historians, no matter how exhaustive, will find them.” However, sufficient historical documentation does survive to identify most of the men who were killed in this early encounter of the 1862 Peninsula Campaign—some of whom still lie in unmarked and unremembered graves along roadways where busy commuters hurry every day. Douglas Ubelaker, curator of anthropology at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History, reminds historians as well as anthropologists that “the real meaning of life can disappear under piles of data.”² Every soldier, north or south, whose death resulted from the small battle of Eltham’s Landing—whether instantaneously on the battlefield or lingeringly on a hospital cot—had a name and a story. Each deserves to be remembered for the ultimate sacrifice he made. What follows is the best attempt thus far to attach names to the impersonal mortality statistics from this small chapter of our Civil War.

² Ubelaker, Douglas, and Henry Scammell. *Bones: A Forensic Detective’s Casebook*. New York: Edward Burlingame Books, 1992.

I. Union Soldiers Killed in Action and Buried at Brickhouse Landing

Between July 1866 and February 1867, the remains of 32 Union soldiers buried at Brickhouse Landing immediately after the battle were disinterred and reburied at Yorktown National Cemetery.³ Unfortunately, in the more than four years following their burial, many identifying markers (usually a simple board containing the name and regiment) were lost or destroyed. Only the remains of a dozen soldiers still were identifiable. They now lie at Yorktown beneath stone markers inscribed with their names and regiments.

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Bishop, Edwin R., Pvt., Co. F, 16 th New York Vol. Infantry | Grave #1052 |
| Case, Philip, Cpl., Co. E, 31 st New York Vol. Infantry | Grave #1058 |
| Dinkel, John, Pvt., Co. E, 31 st New York Vol. Infantry ⁴ | Grave #1070 |
| Elpert, John, Pvt., Co. E, 31 st New York Vol. Infantry | Grave #1068 |
| Hahn, Ferdinand, Pvt., Co. E, 31 st New York Vol. Infantry | Grave #1062 |
| Leisner, Anton, Pvt., Co. E, 31 st New York Vol. Infantry | Grave #1060 |
| Linsuer, William, Pvt., Co. E, 31 st New York Vol. Infantry | Grave #1047 |
| Love, George J., Cpl., Co. F, 16 th New York Vol. Infantry ⁵ | Grave #1046 |
| McDougal, James, Pvt., Co. H, 31 st New York Vol. Infantry | Grave #1064 |
| Miller, Jacob, Pvt., Co. E, 31 st New York Vol. Infantry | Grave #33 |
| Murphy, James A., Pvt., Co. H, 31 st New York Infantry | Grave #1056 |
| Ploof, Peter G., Pvt., Co. F, 16 th New York Infantry | Grave #1050 |

An additional 20 soldiers, originally buried at Brickhouse Landing, lie beneath “unknown” markers at Yorktown (see “V. Union Soldiers Whose Final Resting Places Are Unknown”).

II. Union Soldiers Who Died of Wounds and Were Buried at Fortress Monroe

Troop transports that carried Union soldiers up the York River to Brickhouse Landing returned to Fortress Monroe carrying many of the wounded. Some died aboard the transports and others died at Hygeia Hospital, a converted hotel adjacent to the fort. Their remains were buried near the hospital. Four months after Appomattox, the federal government proposed that this cemetery be “plowed and the graves leveled.” A *New York Times* editorial led public outcry, demanding that “measures should at once be taken to preserve from desecration the last resting place of so many true and noble patriots.”⁶ Bowing to pressure, the government disinterred the remains at Fortress Monroe and reburied them at Hampton National Cemetery. All except one lie beneath markers that read “unknown.”

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| Acker, George, Musician, Co. A, 32 nd New York Vol. Infantry | “Unknown” |
| Chatterton, Charles E., Cpl., Co. G, 32 nd New York Vol. Infantry ⁷ | Grave #F 0 4781 |
| Gawley, Christopher, Pvt., Co. A, 95 th Pennsylvania Infantry ⁸ | “Unknown” |
| Gimminani, Pedro, Cpl., Co. A, 95 th Pennsylvania Infantry | “Unknown” |

³ National Archives and Records Administration, “Report of final disposition of remains of deceased Union Soldiers in the National Cemetery at Yorktown, Va., made by Bvt. Lt. Col. Jas. M. Moore, Asst. Quartermaster, U.S. Army, on the 23rd day of February 1867.”

⁴ KIA; shot in the chest and bayoneted.

⁵ KIA; shot and killed by Pvt. John Deal, 4th Texas Infantry.

⁶ *The New York Times*, August 14, 1865.

⁷ Died of wounds at Hygeia Hospital, May 21, 1862.

⁸ Died of wounds May 9, 1862.

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Millegan, Abijah B., Pvt., Co. I, 95 th Pennsylvania Infantry ⁹ | “Unknown” |
| Murphy, Terrence, Cpl., Co. A, 95 th Pennsylvania Infantry | “Unknown” |
| Proctor, John, Cpl., Co. A, 95 th Pennsylvania Infantry | “Unknown” |
| Smith, William, Pvt., Co. H, 31 st New York Vol. Infantry ¹⁰ | “Unknown” |

III. Union Soldiers Who Died of Wounds and Were Buried at Other National Cemeteries

Some wounded soldiers were transported to army hospitals in Washington, DC, or in places closer to their homes. They undoubtedly had temporary burials before being reinterred in national cemeteries established after the war.

| | |
|--|--------------------|
| Cypress Hills National Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY | |
| Davis, Almon, Pvt., Co. E, 32 nd New York Vol. Infantry ¹¹ | Section 1, Site 64 |
| Philadelphia National Cemetery, Philadelphia, PA | |
| Knorr, Jacob F., Pvt., Co. D, 95 th Pennsylvania Infantry ¹² | Grave #N135 |
| United States Soldiers and Airmen’s Home National Cemetery, Washington, DC | |
| Carleton, Andrew, Pvt., Co. C, 32 nd New York Vol. Infantry ¹³ | Grave #2324 |
| McClellan, John James, Pvt., Co. I, 95 th Pennsylvania Infantry ¹⁴ | Grave #B1616 |

IV. Union Soldiers Whose Remains Were Recovered by Families for Private Burial

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| Forest Park Cemetery, Camden, New York | |
| Wilson, John H., Pvt., Co. H, 32 nd New York Vol. Infantry ¹⁵ | |
| Green Hill Cemetery, Amsterdam, NY | |
| Baker, Van Renselaer R., Pvt., Co. B, 32 nd New York Vol. Infantry ¹⁶ | |
| Lane, Frank N., Cpl., Co. B, 32 nd New York Vol. Infantry | |
| Young, Elisha S., Cpt., Co. D, 32 nd New York Vol. Infantry ¹⁷ | |
| Greenridge Cemetery, Saratoga, NY | |
| Babcock, Horatio G., 1Lt., Co. D, 31 st New York Vol. Infantry ¹⁸ | |
| Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York | |
| Pross, Frederick, 1Lt, Co. F, 31 st New York Vol. Infantry | |
| Twaddell, James T., 1Lt, Co. F, 32 nd New York Vol. Infantry ¹⁹ | Lot 4255, Sect. 71 |
| Wallace, Edmond, 1Lt., Co. G, 32 nd New York Vol. Infantry | |

⁹ Died of wounds May 8, 1862.

¹⁰ Regimental muster roll states that he died aboard a transport but he appears on a patient roll at Hygeia Hospital on May 11, 1862.

¹¹ Received gunshot wounds in the left hand and thigh. Died of wounds at Ladies’ Home Hospital in New York City, June 7, 1862. Gravestone spells his given name “Almond.”

¹² Died of wounds June 15, 1862.

¹³ Died of wounds between May 30 and June 1, 1862. Gravestone spells his surname “Carlton.”

¹⁴ Died of wounds May 19, 1862. Gravestone includes only his middle name.

¹⁵ Died of wounds May 27, 1862.

¹⁶ Died of wounds May 8, 1862.

¹⁷ KIA; shot in the throat.

¹⁸ Died of wounds May 9, 1862.

¹⁹ Died of wounds July 5, 1862; “An Ex-Police Sergeant, Killed at the Battle of West Point, to be Buried with Honors” *New York Times*, July 11, 1862.

Ithaca City Cemetery, Ithaca, New York

Smith, James M., Pvt., Co. I, 32nd New York Vol. Infantry²⁰ Grave #G-24-2

Smith–Green Cemetery, Chateaugay, New York

Seabury, Caleb, Pvt., Co. G, 16th New York Vol. Infantry²¹

Willow Glen Cemetery, Dryden, New York

Brown, Sylvester H., Cpt., Co. C, 32nd New York Vol. Infantry

V. Union Soldiers Whose Final Resting Places Are Unknown

Many of the soldiers listed below are likely to be among the 20 unidentified sets of remains from Brickhouse Landing buried as unknowns at Yorktown National Cemetery.

Ankner, Joseph, Pvt., Co. E, 31st New York Vol. Infantry

Bailey, John L., 2Lt., Co. D, 27th New York Vol. Infantry²²

Conklin, John H., Pvt., Co. E, 32nd New York Vol. Infantry

Diamond, Lewis, Pvt., Co. E, 32nd New York Vol. Infantry

Garlock, Alfred, Cpl., Co. E, 32nd New York Vol. Infantry

Gates, Valentine, Cpl., Co. E, 31st New York Vol. Infantry

Gies, Friederich, Pvt., Co. E, 31st New York Vol. Infantry

Hauer, Christian, Pvt., Co. F, 31st New York Vol. Infantry

Heiss, August, Cpt., Co. E, 31st New York Vol. Infantry

Klein, Charles, 1Lt., Co. E, 31st New York Vol. Infantry²³

Mindermann, Henry, Pvt., Co. F, 31st New York Vol. Infantry

Morse, Alpheus, Pvt., Co. G, 5th Maine Infantry

Muller, Charles, Sgt., Co. E, 31st New York Vol. Infantry²⁴

Mummery, Francis, Pvt., Co. G, 16th New York Vol. Infantry²⁵

Musleman, Thomas, Pvt., Co. F, 32nd New York Vol. Infantry

Riley, Peter, Pvt., Co. D, 32nd New York Vol. Infantry

Sawyer, Aaron F., Pvt., Co. C, 32nd New York Vol. Infantry

Stelz, Philipp, Pvt., Co. F, 31st New York Vol. Infantry

Waymouth, William F., Pvt., Co. G, 16th New York Vol. Infantry²⁶

²⁰ Suffered gunshot wounds in the lower right chest and lower back. Died of wounds at Judiciary Square Hospital, Washington, DC, May 23, 1862. Following post-mortem, his bullet-furrowed sacrum was sent to the newly opened Army Medical Museum.

²¹ Left behind, wounded, after the initial Confederate attack, he lived long enough to tell his comrades that Confederate soldiers had been kind to him and had done all they could to make him comfortable. According to the regimental history, he was initially buried at Brickhouse Landing. Evidently his family recovered the body for reburial in New York.

²² Shot and killed by Confederate scout John Cussons, 4th Alabama Infantry. Buried at Brickhouse Landing, according to regimental history; likely at Yorktown in an “unknown” grave.

²³ Died of wounds May 9, 1862.

²⁴ KIA; shot in the side.

²⁵ Incapacitated by a bullet wound, he refused to surrender. He fought on with a sidearm until his ammunition was expended and then his throat was cut with a Bowie knife. Buried at Brickhouse Landing, according to regimental history; likely at Yorktown in an “unknown” grave.

²⁶ Shot and killed while reloading his musket. Buried at Brickhouse Landing, according to regimental history; likely at Yorktown in an “unknown” grave.

VI. Confederate Soldiers Killed in Action and Buried on or Near the Battlefield

Some Confederate dead were buried by comrades close to where they fell. Others were buried close to a Confederate field hospital in the vicinity of Barhamsville or where they were found by Union troops on the day following the battle. New Kent County historian Dr. Malcolm Hart Harris wrote that seven of the dead Texans were interred in a mass grave “by the road where Mount Nebo Church now stands.”²⁷

Brown, Joseph F., Pvt., Co. L, 1st Texas Infantry
Cornwell, Samuel B., Pvt., Co. H, 1st Texas Infantry²⁸
Covey, Charles F., Pvt., Co. D, 1st Texas Infantry
Decatur, Harry E., 1Lt., Co. C, 1st Texas Infantry
Denny, W. D., Cpt., Commissary Officer, 5th Texas Infantry²⁹
Etle, John, Pvt., Co. A, 1st Texas Infantry
Hartley, William H., Sgt., Co. I, 4th Alabama Infantry³⁰
Hill, D. J., Pvt., Co. H, 1st Texas Infantry
Hinnant, Henry, Pvt., Co. A, 1st Texas Infantry
Mills, Perry M., Pvt., Co. H, 1st Texas Infantry
O’Brien, Martin, Pvt., Co. G, 1st Texas Infantry
Schadt, Charles, Pvt., Co. L, 1st Texas Infantry
Scherer, Riley L., Pvt., Co. B, 5th Texas Infantry
Spencer, Charles W., Pvt., Co. G, 4th Texas Infantry

VII. Confederate Soldiers Who Died of Wounds and Were Buried in the Semple–Mayo Cemetery at Cedar Hill Plantation in New Kent County

These soldiers died in ambulances while being transported from the battlefield to the railhead at White House. They were buried in a family cemetery close to the place where they died. When New Kent County historian Dr. Malcolm Hart Harris examined this property in the 1940s he discovered the cellar hole of the former plantation house but “a careful search for a burial ground failed to disclose any signs.”³¹ Confederate private Valerius Cincinnatus Giles of the 4th Texas Infantry apparently was prophetic when he wrote about this interment: “I don’t suppose there is a soldier living today that could point out that lonely grave.”³²

Black, Harvey H., LTC, 1st Texas Infantry³³
Bush, James., Pvt., Co. F, 1st Texas Infantry

²⁷ Malcolm Hart Harris, *Old New Kent County* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2006), vol. 1, 581.

²⁸ KIA; shot through the head.

²⁹ Soldiers of the 27th New York Volunteer Infantry reported finding his fresh grave, marked with a board, on the day after the battle. This grave would have been located near the place where the 5th Texas encountered the 95th Pennsylvania along the road between Barhamsville and Brickhouse (now Farmers Drive).

³⁰ Shot by Cpl. Henry Crocker, 27th New York Vol. Infantry. The bullet passed through his arm and lodged in his neck as he was raising his musket to fire. He was interred where he fell by soldiers of the 27th New York Vol. Infantry.

³¹ Harris, *Old New Kent County*, vol. 1, 106.

³² Valerius Cincinnatus Giles, *Rags and Hope: The Recollections of Val C. Giles, Four Years with Hood’s Brigade*, ed. Mary Lasswell (New York: Coward-McCann, 1961), 98.

³³ Shot through the hand; a second bullet wound in the side proved mortal.

VIII. Confederate Soldiers Who Died of Wounds and Were Buried Elsewhere

Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond, Virginia

Estes, Benjamin F., Pvt., Co. A, 19th Georgia Infantry Soldiers Section
Lieber, Oscar M., Pvt., Co. A, Hampton (South Carolina) Legion³⁴ Section R
Spencer, John L., 2Lt., Co. H, 1st Texas Infantry³⁵ Soldiers Section L, #38

Oakwood Cemetery, Richmond, Virginia

Wedding, John T., Pvt., Co. B, 6th North Carolina Infantry³⁶

Burial places unknown

Mahon, Tom, Pvt., Co. A, 1st Texas Infantry³⁷
Setser, P., Pvt., Co. A, 1st Texas Infantry

³⁴ Suffered a gunshot wound in the upper left chest, near the shoulder. Died of complications related to this wound at the home of Corbin Warwick, 511 East Grace St., June 27, 1862

³⁵ Died of wounds May 19, 1862.

³⁶ Died of wounds at Ligon Hospital, May 17, 1862; *Fayetteville Observer*, June 2, 1862.

³⁷ Died of wounds May 19, 1862.

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