





John,

Thanks for you re-mail. It was good to hear from you. I hope we can arrange lunch and find time for you to see the exhibit on the Soldier's excavation and re-interment at the Fairfax County Government Center. I am sorry for the circumstances that precipitated your call.

As I told you, we had a similar experience with Ms. Mironchuck several years ago. I thought that we had fully and respectfully answered all of her questions, assertions and accusations. However, that appears not to be the case.

The following comments are as specific as I can provide and are arranged from the earliest e-mail you sent to the latest:

I. Bill Ryerson's e-mail contained comments that reflected probably the sources of his information and therefore not all of the facts:

A. The implication is incorrect that Smithsonian Forensic Anthropologist, Dr. Douglas Owsly "tied the remains up for years." Fairfax County Archeology delivered the remains to Dr. Owsly for analysis, which considering the fact that he is one of the Nation's foremost physical anthropologists, resulted in a timely report. We authorized him to conduct stable isotope analysis on the remains to help identify the country of origin in case they may have been immigrants. Of course that took time. Once this was done I chose to leave the remains at the Smithsonian for better security. Dr. Owsly graciously accepted them for that purpose. Outside access to the remains were through me.

B. The assertion that Dr. Owsley "wouldn't even talk to anybody," is something that I could only comment on second hand, which would be inappropriate. It would be useful to know who the "anybody" was. However, I know personally that, because of the demand on his time, Dr. Owsly is difficult to reach.

C. Ryerson's e-mail implies, apparently from his source, that the NVRHA excavated the soldiers. The whole process was personally overseen by me and the excavations were personally directed by Dr. Owsly and his staff, which included trained forensic field techs from the Fairfax County's archeology program and Smithsonian employees and forensic interns. All of the bones were personally removed by Dr. Owsly and his staff. As far as I know, neither the NVRHA crew or our volunteers removed any of the mapped bones. The NVRHA team worked under the supervision of one of our techs on one grave only. The remaining five graves were excavated and mapped by volunteers from the Fairfax County Archeology Program, also under the direct and close supervision of Owsly and his staff. Here is the accuracy of the statement: I consider the grave excavated by the relic hunters to have been the most thorough and best documented of the six. This is, in part, because they used a metal detector to locate metal objects before they encountered them in the soil. The other parts were their experience and excellent commitment to the job. It was an outstanding piece of work.

D. That "they had all the names listed who they claimed through their research 'who was who'" is accurate. The key word is "claimed." Dalton Rector, who is the relic hunter, who (I believe) gave the talk in New Hampshire, did some excellent work, as did our own historians. Rector found the key piece of evidence that led everyone but Owsly to conclude that they were casualties from Blackburn's Ford and probably from the First Massachusetts. However, the claim that the NVRHA (Rector) knew who each soldier was is not anywhere near a slam dunk. In fact,

the stable isotope results that Owsley got concluded that the soldiers had been raised, in part, on a corn diet. That would indicate that they were from North America and possibly even the South, where corn, rather than wheat, was more of a dietary staple. The other lines of evidence, which included specific pre-1860 militia uniform parts, supported the hypothesis that they were casualties of First Bull Run and Union, and not from the New York regiment that also was involved at Blackburn's Ford, which was several days before the main engagement. The formal circumstances of their interment and later abandonment suggested that the graves had been ceremonially buried but lost, which would suggest they died at or shortly after the preliminary engagement at Blackburn's Ford. Likely, they would not have been lost during later Union occupations of Centreville. Based on other lines of evidence, the uniforms were not regular Union Army issue, which would have been the case at a later date. Owsley's forensic evidence supported some identities but not others. However, the forensic evidence was complicated by the fact that some of the skeletons were not in a good state of preservation. As a professional, Owsley does not make unwarranted leaps designed to fit preconceived agendas.

E. The laments by Ryerson contain statements upon which I cannot comment, since I do not know what went on in Massachusetts between Ryerson and the State Police. I am surprised that the State Police would respond so negatively to such an obviously important historical situation.

F. I vehemently disagree with Ryerson's contention that these soldiers were buried in haste. My contacts with the Sons, particularly Frank Haley, over the reburial was lengthy and in good faith. I believe that I have copies of most of the e-mails. Furthermore, my decision to accept the Bourne offer was based on the fact that the remains had been in boxes at either our lab or that of the Smithsonian for almost nine years, which was way too long. They should be treated with more respect and reburied. Here is where the rub lies: Many years before the reburial, Rector proposed to research the possibility that a modern DNA match could be found. I agreed to defer my efforts to rebury them, which I was bound to do by my permit from the State of Virginia. I waited and waited for Rector to arrange to have the work done. At one point early in the process he told me that he had identified a living relative of Wentworth for DNA comparison. I waited for many years, not months, for him to arrange for the testing. I even gave him advice on how to find funding. Years later, when I was finally contacted by the Sons, it became clear to me that nothing was going to be done with the DNA so we agreed to start the process to re-bury them in Massachusetts. It was done with the explicit understanding that anyone, including Rector (and later, Ms. Mironchuck), who could come up with the funding could petition to have the soldiers exhumed for testing, which everyone would support. The only difference between now and before is that they have been respectfully reburied in a cemetery appropriate to the evidence, rather than sitting in cardboard boxes in a Smithsonian store room.

When we came up for the funeral and I saw the six pine coffins, I noticed that each coffin had an individual name from the 11-14 possible candidates from the documentary research. I had the plaques removed and replaced with numbers that conformed to the sequential numbers on each grave. This was done so no one could be tempted to bias future DNA research. My reasoning was that if someone could come up with appropriate candidates for DNA testing then the appropriate coffin could be exhumed and the bones tested for a match. Yes. They are "unknown." They are also buried that way on purpose. It was well thought out with only the utmost respect for whomever they may be. It is better for any potential descendants that they have no name rather than the wrong name.

II. Stephen Twining e-mail: See paragraph I. F. above. The simple answer is, Yes. However, we deferred to Mr. Rector, who apparently had limited resources. He did an amazing job in locating one possible match. We did have some discussions and did some research about retaining DNA samples before the funeral. However, no one could find the more than \$10,000 needed. We finally gave up and proceeded with the planned reburial. However, as I have stressed with everyone who has brought the DNA issue up, it is merely contingent on obtaining the funds and living relatives. Whether the six soldiers are respectfully buried in Bourne or sitting in

a Smithsonian store room is not relevant to the DNA issue. The funds and living relatives are needed first. Then it is a simple task.

III. Donald E. Darby e-mail: I have no major disagreements with his comments. To honor those soldiers is appropriate.

IV. Nadine Mironchuck e-mail:

A. The statement that "If someone told you that they did a check for descendants, then you were misinformed" depends on who she means by "they." We never did a check for descendants and never claimed to have done so. Dalton Rector of the Northern Virginia Relic Hunter's Assn. agreed to do that and we deferred reburial at National Cemetery or in Centreville to enable him to pursue it. We were only obliged by our permit to put an ad in the local paper, but deferred to the genealogy and Dalton Rector's search. We felt that he would have a better chance with a focused search than our trying to find descendants in the local newspapers, especially since these soldiers probably were not from the D.C. area.

B. The statement, "No one stepped forward because none were searched for" seems to be incorrect. Dalton Rector claims not only to have searched for descendants but also to have found a potential DNA candidate and living relative of Wentworth. This appears to have been years before Ms. Mironchuck knew the remains of the six soldier's existed. If she had known then I can only ask, why she did not approach me?

C. I cannot comment on the comments about the Sons relationship to the Chelsea Veterans Representative.

D. I applaud Ms. Mironchuck's intent to pursue the DNA work as she indicated in her e-mail. We will support that effort in any way we can. Responding to her request, I recently sent her the report and other info on our work.

E. That this was done in a "slipshod manner" is her opinion. It is not born out by the facts as related above and related directly to her in her and my lengthy e-mail exchanges of several years ago. If you wish I will make copies of the exchange and mail them to you. I suggest that if anyone has a problem with what we did they can contact me personally. I do not claim that we did everything perfectly. We had no obligation under our permit to go as far as we did. All I can say is that we gave a good faith effort to obey the law and satisfy the interested parties who were made aware to us and who we could find. It is because of this effort that Ms. Mironchuck became aware that these soldiers, potentially from Chelsea, were recovered.

F. With respect to the burial placement, I have no idea what she is talking about. That information can be easily matched between the re-burial records and the report. We went to very great lengths to make sure the soldiers were buried in the same order as they were recovered in the field. As I recall, we even left copies of the burial inventories in the coffins so it would be simple to verify that the graves were in correct order. I was also present at the actual grave site to verify the process.

G. The "NINE years that these remains were held and no one from Chelsea was contacted" is an interesting spin on the facts. First it took several years to even come to the conclusion that they were probably from Blackburn's Ford and Massachusetts rather than a later Union occupation of Centreville. We were going over conflicting evidence of uniform data vs. reported

deaths in which the final disposition of the remains could not be determined. Much of the early historical work was misdirected by a diary entry that was later exposed by Rector to have been inaccurate. The diary author probably could not have known what he claimed to have seen, since he probably was not there. The extensive and intensive historical/genealogical research by CK Gailey and the late Pat Gallagher has been reproduced in hard copy and is several inches thick.

I had explored having the soldiers reburied at Arlington National cemetery but then Rector insisted on doing the genealogy to see if he could find living descendants who would be candidates for DNA analysis. This is where the major portion of the delay took place - 5-6 years. We were not obliged to do this but were hopeful that it would be productive. In fact, we could have reburied the six soldiers within three years. We had an offer to pursue reburial in Centreville but did not accept it because by then I had committed to Rector's request. Over the intervening years we contacted him and he contacted us concerning his progress. When Frank Haley contacted me with the offer to rebury I had not heard from Rector in quite a while and determined that he had failed in his efforts. However, it did not matter, because by then I had determined that the six soldiers had been out of the ground for far too long and that it would be more appropriate if they were reburied. Again, this was never meant to be the final chapter. To permit accurate DNA testing in the future is the precise reason why I had the name plates taken off the coffins and had them redesignated by their original burial order.

V. Dan Murray's email: I have no comment other than if you do take me up on sending you my email exchanges with Ms. Mironchuck you will find his characterization of her tone and spin to be accurate. I would state that it is also unnecessary and counter-productive. I would be thrilled if she is able to positively identify any or all of the six soldiers as being from Chelsea. No one is opposing, preventing or ever prevented her from doing so. That is why her attitude and tone is so perplexing. As long as the soldiers were my responsibility, I was determined not to repeat the problem we had with Mr. Rector's efforts - anyone wanting to do the DNA analysis would have to have the potential living descendents and financing lined up first.

It has been a pleasure to work with you and your fellow Sons of Union Veterans. We look forward to seeing you sometime around Memorial Day.

Sincerely,

Mike Johnson, Senior Archeologist
John,

Please note that I misspelled Doug Owsley's last name. "Owsly" is the original spelling, used by the first Owsley in the New World, Thomas Owsly. You may ask how do I know this:

Back in the mid-1980s I was doing a shoreline survey of Fort Belvoir, which is on the Potomac River. One of our History Commission Members, historians and volunteers, Edith Sprouse directed me to a 1715 map that showed the Belvoir shoreline. The map had a plantation symbol on a currently recognizable shoreline feature. The annotation for the symbol state, "the old plantation where Owsly did live by a tombstone dated ye Oct. 10, 1700." We looked without success for both the tombstone and plantation site. When I finished the report, I packaged it up and put it in our outgoing mail slot. I picked up my incoming mail and in it was a letter from the Smithsonian. To my total amazement the name above the return address read, "Owsley." I had never heard of the name before working on Belvoir. I call it the ultimate "psychic archeology."

Sorry for the error.

Public and Intergovernmental Affairs

Civil War Soldiers to be Buried in Massachusetts National Cemetery

June 12, 2006

WASHINGTON – One hundred and forty-five years after their deaths on a battlefield in northern Virginia during the Civil War are returning home to Massachusetts. They were buried with full military honors on June 10.

“These soldiers made the ultimate sacrifice for the preservation of our nation,” said the Honorable R. James O’Connell, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. “We don’t know their names. We cannot locate their families. But we are honored to bury them in service on the hallowed grounds of a national cemetery.”

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) buried the remains in a VA-run cemetery, which is maintained as a “shrine,” five weeks shy of the 145th anniversary of their deaths on July 18, 1861, the eve of the first battle of Bull Run.

VA and the Massachusetts Sons of Union Veterans planned a burial ceremony June 10 at 11:00 a.m. at the Massachusetts National Cemetery in Bourne, Mass. The ceremony included Civil War re-enactors and full military honors.

The remains were discovered in 1997 on a construction site in Centreville, Va. Scientists from the Smithsonian Institution identified the remains as soldiers of the 1st Massachusetts infantry who were killed during a skirmish known as Black Bank. The VA was unable to establish the identities of the soldiers.

The Massachusetts Sons of Union Soldiers, working with Fairfax County, Va., which had legal custody of the remains, requested their transfer to their home state. Like other veterans of the armed forces, the Civil War soldiers are eligible for burial in a national cemetery.

Veterans with a discharge other than dishonorable, their spouses and eligible dependent children can be buried in a national cemetery. Other burial benefits available for all eligible veterans, regardless of whether they are buried in a national cemetery, include a burial flag, a Presidential Memorial Certificate and a government headstone or marker.

In the midst of the largest cemetery expansion since the Civil War, VA operates 123 national cemeteries and 33 soldiers’ lots and monument sites. More than three million Americans, including veterans of every war from the Revolutionary War to the current war against terrorism — are buried in VA’s national cemeteries on more than 100,000 acres.

Information on VA burial benefits can be obtained from national cemetery offices, from the Internet at <http://www.va.gov> or from VA regional offices toll-free at 1 800-827-1000.

For more information on the Massachusetts event call Paul McFarland, Cemetery Director, at (508) 562-1000.

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