

The Drowning of Capt. John M. Bell and Five Enlisted Men of the 44th OVI

Submitted by Mark Strojek. Researched and written by Daniel H. Reigle. This article was originally published in the *Ohio Civil War Genealogy Journal*, Volume IX, 2005, #3. By the Ohio Genealogical Society. This article is owned by Daniel H. Reigle, and no reproduction of it is permitted without specific permission.

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In the manuscript collection at the Ohio Genealogical Society Library are three newspaper clippings from late 1861 and early 1862 describing the tragic drowning deaths of a company commander and five of his enlisted men of Company K, 44th Ohio Volunteer Infantry, in the Kanawha River near Charleston, (West) Virginia. The clippings were donated to the OGS Library in 1984 by Dr. Richard B. Miller, great-grandson of Capt. John M. Bell, the company commander. Mark Strojek, a work-study student at the OGS Library, discovered these clippings and submitted them to *OCWGJ* for publication. There is approximately one month's gap between each of the three clippings. Transcriptions of the clippings are presented here first, followed by additional information and perspective on the men and the accident.

"Horrible Accident—Capt. Bell and Five of His Men Drowned in the Kanawha River"

Unidentified, undated newspaper clipping from John M. Bell Papers, MSS 16, File 6, Ohio Genealogical Society Library. (Author's note: Based on the other clippings, this is probably from the *Washington Register*, Washington Court House, Ohio, Thursday, 21 November 1861.)

"HORRIBLE ACCIDENT—CAPT. BELL AND FIVE OF HIS MEN DROWNED IN THE KANAWHA RIVER.—On last Saturday, about 11 o'clock, we received mournful tidings from Camp Piatt, Va., twelve miles from Charleston, on the Kanawha river. Great God! Lieut. Col. Wilson, of the 44th Ohio Regiment, telegraphed us that Capt. Jno. M. Bell and five of his men had been drowned about 8 o'clock that morning. Capt. Bell and ten privates, as we learn from Elijah Harrald, with whom we have just had a conversation, on Saturday morning, the 16th, were crossing the river from camp to relieve the pickets on the other side, when they were ran into by the steamer Commodore Perry, and swamped, four privates of the number in the skiff jumping upon the guard of the boat and saving themselves, viz: Joseph B. Straley, Wm. Sinderson, Jos. Simms, John Streets, Presley Thomas. Those who went to a watery grave are: Capt. Jno. M. Bell, John W. Herrald, Abraham Crispin, James Hogue, John T. Greenstead, Joseph Milburn.

The circumstances are about these, as we can gather them: The Commodore Perry, Capt, Johnson, was descending the Kanawha, from Gauley Bridge. They landed at the warf-boat, Camp Piatt, with stern up stream. Capt. Bell and his men started with a skiff above, to cross the river. The Commodore Perry hove from the wharf, and rounded toward the opposite shore, almost instantly coming in contact with the skiff, capsizing it, and sending six as good men as lives to the other side of Jordan. The five men who were saved aided in capsizing the skiff by standing up and jumping for the guard of the boat. Capt. Bell, Elijah Herrald informs us, swam with heavy weight, some three hundred yards, and when within four rods of the shore, and holding up his hand and crying for help! for God's sake! he sank the third time, to rise no more in life! He was loaded pretty heavily, besides having on a thick overcoat. He was seen to turn upon his back and try to unbutton his coat, in order, as was supposed, to get the heft of the spy-glass from his body. 'Twas of no avail! Nothing was on shore to give the drowning men succor! Two or three of them swam as long as was in their power, and went down—the others were killed under the wheel of the boat. Our informant states that the Captain of the boat, Johnson, did nothing to rescue the men, and swore that he would shoot the first one of his crew who undertook to lower the yawl. The soldiers, to the amount of some two hundred, were for taking the boat and Captain, but were prevented by some officers and four hundred from camp, the Colonel promising to have Capt. Johnson arrested.

This sad catastrophe has spread a gloom over Fayette county which Time only can efface. Had ten times the number went down before the cannon's mouth, it would have been more easily borne. These war men were good swimmers,

especially Capt. Bell, but were weighed down with accouterments.

Did not the voice of things created teach us the eternal wisdom of the Creator, the whisperings of the afflicted and saddened hearts in Fayette county would seduce them into rebellion against so mournful a dispensation as that which has fallen to their lot in the loss of these good men. Gloom covers Washington and Fayette county like a pall. People are thoughtful and very sad—not from the storm and darkness of any battle mist—but from the sad calamity of Capt. Bell and his brave and generous men. The tidings of their loss alone may well darken a county knowing and loving them so well. There is sorrow around many a hearthstone today in Fayette county.

“Man foretells afar

The courses of the stars, the very hour
He knows when they shall darken or grow bright;
Yet doth the eclipse of sorrow and of death
Come unforewarned.”

“Eulogy on the Death of Capt. John M. Bell”

Washington Register, Washington Court House, Ohio, 19 December 1861: From John M. Bell Papers, MSS 16, File 6, Ohio Genealogical Society Library. (Author’s note: Capt. Bell’s body had not been recovered when this memorial tribute was delivered in Washington Court House about a month after the accident. Samuel N. Yeoman was a merchant in Washington Court House who enlisted in the 90th OVI the following year and rose to the rank of Colonel as the regimental commander in three years of service.)

“Delivered by S. N. Yeoman, Esq., on the occasion of the Installation of Officers of Fayette Lodge No. 107, F. And A. M. at the M. E. Church, Washington, Wednesday evening, December 11, 1861.

Fellow Citizens, Worshipful Master, Wardens and Brothers:

You have this evening witnessed the ceremonies of a Masonic installation of officers duly chosen to execute the laws and inculcate the virtues of the ancient and honorable Order of Masonry. No Mason can be imbued with a more laudable and virtuous ambition than that of aspiring to be a bright and exemplary teacher of Masonic laws and rites. We have this evening conferred the highest honors that are within the gift of this body upon some of our Brothers. They stand before you the honored recipients of honors that Kings and Potentates of all ages have been gratified to receive and have not hesitated to accept.

It now becomes my duty, in connection with these ceremonies, to recall your minds from the contemplation of honors bestowed on the living to the last sad act of honor and justice due to the memory of our deceased worthy Brother and friend, Captain John M. Bell. An overruling Providence, to whose will our Masonic laws teach us to bow with humble submission, has so ordered it that his bereaved family, the Brotherhood and friends cannot give to his remains the last sad and sacred rite, a Christian burial. No friendly hand can plant at the head of his grave a sprig of cassia, the sacred emblem of a glorious immortality.

“Immortality o’ersweeps

All pain, all tears, all time, all fears, and peals,
Like the eternal thunders of the deep,
Into my ears, this truth—he lives forever.”

In tracing with honest and candid purpose the character and like of our deceased Brother and fellow citizen, and in paying to his memory this tribute of respect, what is said may be taken as a Masonic formality of honor to the deceased; but I shall speak the feelings of friendship, that have grown out of an intimate association, and the familiar intercourse of years. As my knowledge of the life and circumstances that surrounded him increased, I may truly say so grew my respect and affection for him.

Captain John M. Bell was born in the county of Highland, April 9th, 1822. He came to this county with his now

venerable and bereaved parents, in the year 1835, which has been his residence until he met his sad fate by drowning in the Kanawha river, on the 16th day of November last. Notwithstanding the meager educational facilities of our county, in its primitive days, he was a persevering and successful student, possessing a mind richly stored with mathematical and historic lore. He was a scholarly gentleman.

Brother Bell was initiated into this Order January the 29th, passed to the degree of Fellowcraft March 26th, and raised to the sublime degree of Master-Mason April 23d, 1845, filling with honor to himself, and profit to the Fraternity, the most exalted positions known to the laws of our Lodge. Ever an advocate of Order (“Heaven’s first law”) and of Discipline, those who have associated with him in the Lodge know that there was no labor too arduous for him to perform. Prompt in the discharge of duties assigned to him, he naturally expected, and required a like degree of promptness from his colaborers.

Possessing strong natural inclinations and qualifications for military pursuits, at an early age he was elected Field Adjutant to General Battael Harrison, deceased, of this Militia District. When war was declared against Mexico he was among the first to offer his services to the Government; but the company with which he was connected being disbanded, he visited the South, and there volunteered, and was a second time dismissed in consequence of peace being declared. Thus, by a series of circumstances, was he deprived of a participation in that important struggle in which our arms were crowned with glorious and important victories.

In the summer of 1850 I met him upon the shores of the Pacific, and there first knew him as an associate and companion. His want of success in the pursuit of wealth was the result of social and generous qualities. His kindness and care for me during a short illness endeared him to me. I had also occasion to witness his devotion in sickness to a Brother of this Lodge, whose name will ever be associated in the minds of all who knew him as the personification of all those qualifications which render men good, true and noble. I refer to Brother Samuel Millikan, whose mortal remains, like those of Brother Bell’s, lie far distant from home, kindred, and friends. Brother Bell’s Masonic temple is complete—it is finished. He has proven his faith by his works. In the discharge of Masonic obligations he was ever zealous, yielding an implicit and cheerful obedience to the laws and usages of Masonry.

The peaceful, prosperous and happy condition of our country was such, and no opportunity offering to become useful to his country or race in a military capacity, his active nature found a congenial and worthy object of interest in endeavoring to advance the educational interests of our county. In this cause he labored earnestly and honestly. One of the pioneer advocates of the free-school system, he lived to assist in raising it to a standard of popularity and efficiency equal to the expectations of its most sanguine friends. I firmly believe that in his hands our educational interests never suffered, never flagged; and that his time, and the whole energy of his active mind, was devoted, with a singleness of purpose that has no equal, furnishing rich and abundant proofs of his honesty and devotion to the cause of Education. There are many of his pupils now in this assembly who will join with me in giving to his memory the hard-earned meed of praise, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” What his energy and influence could achieve, has been done to advance every interest, educational and moral.

But we now have to consider the crowning and most glorious act of his life. In April last, when it became manifest that traitorous foes to the Constitution of his country were marshaling their hosts to assail and overthrow it—when the startling and dire intelligence was heralded, with lightning speed, throughout the Union, that the signal gun of civil war had for the first time echoed through the land, then, as the perpetuity of our Union was trembling in the balance of Anarchy, and the Constitution of our country was reeling under parricidal blows, given the power of deadly, embittered hate, and wrath long pent up, his sympathies were given, without reserve or equivocation, to his country, and his earnest anathemas to the thieving and traitorous conspirators who were striving, with the ingenuity and energy of evil spirits, to dismember it.

When the Executive head of the Nation called upon us to rally in defense of the Constitution, and aid in the enforcement of the laws, he was the first to respond, and proved the noblest of us all. Equal to the crisis, rising above all partisan prejudices, or selfish motives, he offered his arm and life as a bulwark to our Constitutional rights and liberties. Willing to peril or sacrifice his life to defend and preserve intact the Constitution bequeathed to us by our fathers, he called upon us to unite as one man in its defense. You know the proud result.. The youth of our

county responded nobly to that call. For himself, and in behalf of his noble comrades, on receiving from your representative the starry emblem of that Constitutional liberty which it has been our proud prerogative to enjoy for nearly a century, he said that they would return that banner untarnished and undishonored, or not return at all. That pledge was faithfully redeemed. Again we see him, with determined energy and patriotism, recruiting a second company. Surmounting many difficulties and obstacles, success crowns his efforts, and again receiving the flag which he had returned, with it proudly floating in the breeze, he is once more in hostile array, eager and anxious to engage the foes of his country. His management and military tact had already secured the esteem and confidence of his superior officers, and I am informed that steps had been taken to secure his appointment to the position of Major of the regiment, and that the commission has been issued prior to his death, but not delivered.

History contains no instance of a more sublime and utterly unselfish devotion to those who had intrusted their lives to his care, and whose mortal remains lie buried beneath the turbid waters of the Kanawha. He was unflinchingly true to his trust in the presence of impending death. With the ability and opportunity to save his life, by the desertion of his brave and noble comrades, he lost his own life in the effort to save theirs. On the upsetting of the boat, one of his men was carried under the wheel of the steamboat; the Captain and four of them remained above water. By encouragement and assistance rendered to them, he succeeded in placing them, as he supposed, in safety on the wheel of the boat; and as he was in the act of taking a position beside them, the fatal order was given to move the boat. All, save young Hogue and the Captain, immediately sank to rise no more. Counseling and encouraging Hogue, they together breasted the waves in the last desperate effort for life. Young Hogue, seized with cramp, sank. Alone the Captain now redoubled his efforts; but 'twas vain. It was then

“They saw him breast the surges under him,
“And rode upon their backs; he tread the water,
Whose enmity he flung aside, and breasted
The surge most swollen that met him; his bold head
'Bove the contentious waves he kept, and oared
Himself, with his good arms, in lusty stroke—
But failed to reach the shore.”

Fellow Citizens and Brothers: I have truthfully told the story of Brother Captain John M. Bell's life. He was no ordinary man. Amidst the frowns of influence and fortune, he did his duty. An indulgent husband, a kind parent, an obedient son, a good and true Mason, and a steadfast friend, his life is a plain lesson to read, but requiring a brave spirit like his to practice it without wavering. It lies in one word—Duty. That was the watchword inscribed on the banner under which our Brother and friend fought; and in the prime of life with the passion of Love unquenched, and the fire of true Patriotism flashing from his eye, has been buried, with its folds wrapped closely around him. He is now safe in the port of Immortality. There the shining waters of life flow placidly. No Traitors or dangerous Conspirators are there. Peace to his ashes, honor to his memory. For us this teaching which his life affords:

“Powers depart, possessions vanish, and opinions change,
And Passion holds a fluctuating seat;
But midst the storm of circumstances, unshaken,
And subject neither to eclipse nor wane,
Duty exists...Immortality survives.

“The Body of Capt. Bell Found—His Remains Sent For”

Unidentified, undated newspaper clipping from John M. Bell Papers, MSS 16, File 6, Ohio Genealogical Society Library. (Editor's note: Based on the other clippings, this is probably from the *Washington Register*, Washington Court House, Ohio, Thursday, 23 January 1862 or 30 January 1862.)

“THE BODY OF CAPT. BELL FOUND—HIS REMAINS SENT FOR.—Wm. R. Hogue returned here from Camp Piatt, Va., on Saturday morning last, bringing the gladsome news that the body of the late Capt. John M. Bell had been found and buried in a church-yard near the camp. His body was found floating in the river, on the morning of the 17th of January, at a point about two miles above Charleston. The sleeve of his overcoat was torn from his left

arm, the cuff of the right sleeve being still clutched with his left hand, in the act of drawing it off, just as he was about to go down on the unfortunate day. His spy glass, compass, pistol, gold watch and \$30 in money were still upon his person. A squad of men was detailed to bring the body home but there being no boat there to come down on, and no metallic coffin to be had, it was imperative to bury him. Monday afternoon last Joe Knight and E. H. Shoemaker started for the purpose of bringing the remains home, going via Cincinnati, taking with them a metallic burial case from the undertaking establishment of Thomas Burnett, of this place. Mr. Shoemaker was sent by the Order of Odd Fellows, of which institution Capt. Bell was a member, and who are to officiate in the funeral obsequies, in compliance with the request of his wife. The Masons, of which Order he was also a member, will assist. The remains will not, in all probability, reach here before next Monday on the afternoon train from Cincinnati.”

Capt. John M. Bell

John Bell was a 38-year-old school teacher in Washington Court House, Fayette County, Ohio, when the Civil War began. He and his wife, Eliza Jane (Wootten), had five daughters, Sarah Jane, Ada Louise, Lizzie Wallace, Eliza Ann, and Jesse Apler, born in 1861 just before her father's death. Perhaps to supplement his teacher's salary, Bell was a census-taker during the summer of 1860 in Washington Court House, an experience that undoubtedly served him well as a military recruiter less than a year later.

When the war began, Bell immediately recruited a company for the 3-months' service, mustered as Company F, 22nd Ohio Volunteer Infantry, on 27 April 1861. One of his recruits was his niece's husband, Michael Herbert, office foreman of the *Washington Register* and later a banker in Washington Court House for many years. The 22nd moved quickly to western Virginia, and performed railroad security throughout its tenure. Although involved in many skirmishes, the regiment's only deaths were caused by a railroad accident that killed four men and critically injured fourteen more.

Returning home in August at the expiration of service, Bell immediately began recruiting a new company for 3-years' service. Between 3 September and 10 October, he enrolled two officers, five sergeants, 8 corporals, and 66 privates, all but six of them in Fayette County. Bell's company became Company K, 44th Ohio Volunteer Infantry, upon its organization at Springfield on 14 October, and the unit immediately departed through Cincinnati for Camp Piatt, (West) Virginia, about 10 miles up the Kanawha River from Charleston. In a statement that belies the danger even of routine camp life, given the tragic deaths of Capt. Bell and his colleagues, *The Union Army* indicates that the 44th OVI, after reaching Camp Piatt, “remained in camp all the following winter, quietly drilling”.

The first clipping above was probably not the first news report that arrived about the accident, because the Washington Court House newspaper was a weekly paper that was not published until the Thursday after the accident. The first news report may have been the following message sent to the editors of the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*:

“Camp Enyart, Va. Saturday night, November 16, 1861

Eds. Com:--This afternoon Capt. Bell, of Company K, of the 44th Ohio, with his Orderly Sergeant and six others of his company, were drowned in the Kanawha River at this place. The captain with ten others, were in a yawl, in the act of crossing the river. The steamboat Commodore Perry backed on them, which resulted in the death of eight of the eleven who were in the yawl at the time. None of the bodies of those drowned have yet been found. I have not been able to learn the names of the others lost, as it is late at night, and the boat that I am aboard leaves in a few moments. I left a box of goods for Capt. Bell ten days ago, as I went up the river. I stopped here tonight expecting to see him, when I was informed of his sad death.....

Yours in haste, A. E. Strickle.”

Abraham E. Strickle was a 52-year-old businessman and Republican politician from Wilmington, OH, who was deeply involved in supporting the war effort from the beginning. He later volunteered for military duty and was commissioned as a commissary officer. He contracted malaria during the siege of Vicksburg, and died in July, 1863.

As the third clipping above indicates, Capt. Bell's body was recovered in January. *The Herald*, a weekly newspaper

published in Washington Court House, indicated in November and December articles that none of the bodies had been recovered. In its December 26th issue, the newspaper reported that “a member of the late Capt. Bell’s company” had returned to Washington Court House with news that Capt. Bell’s body had been recovered and buried at Charleston. This turned out to be incorrect, and was refuted in the January 23rd issue by another member of the company who wrote regularly to *The Herald* under the pen name TYPO, and who accused his anonymous colleague of making a “heavy draft upon his imagination for his information.” TYPO’s letter did report, however, that Joseph Milburn’s body had been recovered about two miles below Camp Piatt.

The Herald, in its January 30th edition, confirmed the report in the third clipping above that Capt. Bell’s body had been recovered as reported by James Hogue’s father, Wm. R. Hogue. In its February 6th edition, *The Herald* reported:

“The remains of Capt. Bell, who was drowned in the Kanawha a few weeks hence, were brought here on Tuesday afternoon last, in charge of Mr. Joseph Knight and Mr. E. H. Shoemaker, who left here last week for that purpose. The Funeral Services will take place this afternoon at 3 ½ o’clock. At his late residence on Court Street.”

He was buried in the Washington Cemetery, Section 9. Joe Knight, one of the men sent to bring the body home, was a nephew of Capt. Bell. Eliza Jane never remarried and remained in Washington Court House until her death in 1901. She received a widow’s pension from the government.

The commander of the 44th OVI was Col. Samuel A. Gilbert of West Zanesville, OH, a civil engineer and large landholder. Second in command was Lt. Col. H. Blair Wilson, a schoolteacher and lawyer from Springfield, Clark County, OH. The regiment continued on duty in (West) Virginia and Kentucky through the end of 1863, seeing action in two engagements at Lewisburg WV on 23 May 1862 and at Dutton’s Hill KY on 30 March 1863. In January 1864, 550 of the regiment’s 600 men re-enlisted as veteran volunteers, and the regiment was redesignated the 8th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry. Divided into two detachments, part of the 8th served at Beverly WV and part served in the Shenandoah Valley battles at Winchester, Fisher’s Hill, and Cedar Creek. The 8th was retained in service until July 1865.

After the war, when Union veterans formed their Grand Army of the Republic, the Washington Court House veterans named their local organization the John M. Bell Post No. 119, chartered in 1881. Membership exceeded one hundred for many years, rising to a peak of 140 members in 1889.

Enlisted Men Involved in the Accident

As indicated in the first clipping above, five enlisted men died in the accident and five survived. Those who died were:

- First Sergeant Abraham Crispin, a farmer, age 35, was survived by his wife, Mary, and one daughter. Mary received a widow’s pension.

- Corporal James Hogue, age 20, son of Jeffersonville farmer, William R. Hogue (mentioned in the third clipping). His brother, John C. Hogue, served in the 90th OVI, was wounded at Kennesaw Mountain GA on 27 June 1864, and died at Chattanooga on 4 July 1864. Both men are listed as buried at the Hogue-Allen Cemetery in Jefferson Township. However, John is also listed as buried in Grave E-569 at Chattanooga National Cemetery, so one or both of these markers may be memorials rather than actual gravesites. We have not seen any indication that James Hogue’s body was recovered from the Kanawha River.

- Private John F. Greenstead, age 20.

- Private John W. Herrald, age 36, a laborer in West Lancaster, Fayette County, was survived by his wife, Susan, and by two sons and two daughters. Elijah Herrald, who is the source of the information about the accident in the first story, was also a private in Company K, and we believe him to be John’s brother.

- Private Josephus Milburn, age 21. Other than Capt. Bell, he is the only person mentioned in the available newspaper accounts whose body was reported as having been recovered.

Those who survived the accident were:

- Corporal Joseph M. Sims, age 20. He re-enlisted in 1864, and served in Company K, 8th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry when the 44th was redesignated in January 1864. He was promoted to First Sergeant and to 2nd Lieutenant, and mustered out on 30 July 1865 at Clarksburg, WV. He received a pension from the government.

- Private William Sanderson, age 20, son of West Lancaster farmer, Josephus Sanderson. He re-enlisted in 1864, and served in Company K, 8th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry when the 44th was redesignated in January 1864. He died of disease on 20 June 1865.

- Private Joseph R. Straley, a farmer age 28, married to Elizabeth. He re-enlisted in 1864, and served in Company K, 8th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry when the 44th was redesignated in January 1864. He was mustered out on 30 July 1865 at Clarksburg, WV. His wife, Elizabeth, survived him and received a widow's pension.

- Private John Street, age 39, married to Lucinda. He re-enlisted in 1864, and served in Company K, 8th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry when the 44th was redesignated in January 1864. He was mustered out on 30 July 1865 at Clarksburg, WV. His wife, Lucinda, survived him and received a widow's pension.

- Private (William) Presley Thomas, age 19, son of Jeffersonville farmer Hiram Thomas. He re-enlisted in 1864, and served in Company K, 8th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry when the 44th was redesignated in January 1864. He was mustered out on 2 November 1864, probably indicating that he did not re-enlist as a veteran volunteer.

The Commodore Perry

There were a number of ships named the *Commodore Perry* at the time of the Civil War, including one that served as a converted gunboat in the U.S. Navy. However, through the process of elimination based on dates and locations, we have narrowed the list of ships to one possibility. We do not have positive proof that this is the correct ship, but there is strong circumstantial evidence in its support. According to *Way's Packet Directory*, this tentative *Commodore Perry* was a sternwheeler, wooden hull, built at Freedom PA in 1857 by one of several shipbuilders operating at that time in Freedom, along the Ohio River just downstream from Pittsburgh. The ship operated between Cincinnati and Nashville in 1861 with a Capt. Brown in command. There is no mention of service on the Kanawha or of a Capt. Johnson. She was purchased by Capt. J. M. Andrews in Pittsburgh in February 1862 for the Pittsburgh-Louisville trade. At the Louisville KY wharf on 2 August 1862, the boilers "collapsed a flue" and the ship was burned, causing the death of one crewman, but the 30 passengers on board were able to escape. Flues were the horizontal tubes that carried hot gases from the firebox through the water in the boiler; when a flue collapsed, the pressure reduction allowed the water to boil and expand more rapidly than the boiler could accommodate, causing an explosion (see Reference note under Larry Southwick). The steamer was enroute to Cincinnati from the Cumberland River, loaded with 388 bales of cotton and quantities of wheat, bacon, tobacco, beer kegs, and dry hides, according to accounts in the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*. The ship burned to the water line and was completely destroyed, but the newspaper estimated that half of the freight that had been in the hold would be salvaged.

Our Thanks to the Washington Cemetery

Capt. Bell's grave is marked by a large monument, with an obelisk on top of a cube base. The obelisk had fallen or broken off the base. Normally, responsibility for such repairs would be the responsibility of the family, but there has been no contact with any family members at the cemetery. As an indication of respect for Capt. Bell and his service, Cemetery Superintendent Rankin Kirkpatrick and his staff have repaired and cleaned the marker, which included having to get special equipment to raise the obelisk due to its weight. *OCWGJ* expresses our appreciation and gratitude to Superintendent Kirkpatrick and the cemetery staff for their willingness to take the responsibility, and for their effort in getting it done. Our appreciation also goes to Colonel Robert E. Grim, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, Henry Casey Camp #92, for bringing us together. Thank you!

Conclusion

As tragic as were the deaths of Bell, Crispin, Greenstead, Herrald, Hogue, and Milburn, it is also tragic to realize that they were not unique. In fact, 4944 Union officers and enlisted men were reported to have drowned during the war, likely matched by a large number of Confederates. It is difficult, faced with such deaths that seem so unnecessary, to answer the question, "Why did they die?". The writer in the first clipping expressed the same sentiment: "Had ten times the number went down before the cannon's mouth, it would have been more easily borne." However difficult it is to understand the meaning of non-combat deaths, it seems inevitable that disease, accident, murder, or negligence are part of war and of military operations. Their frequency is reduced by better equipment, training, medical treatment, and operating procedures, but the risk remains. So, the larger question becomes "Why were they here?". We can only assume that these six men put themselves at risk for the reasons described by James McPherson: *For Cause and Comrades*. For putting themselves there, we owe them our appreciation, starting with preserving their memory. The ultimate tragedy would be to forget who they were, what they did, and why they did it.

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Topozone.com. Approximate location of Camp Piatt is near the current location of Belle, WV, on the east/north side of the Kanawha River on 1:100,000 map, Charleston East Quadrangle, Map centered on UTM 17 452649E 4234269N (WGS84/NAD83).

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