

MILITARY ORDER OF THE LOYAL LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES



Loyal Legion Vignettes



JAMES HARMON WARD
THE UNITED STATES' FIRST NAVAL OFFICER CASUALTY
OF THE CIVIL WAR

By

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James Harmon Ward, a native of Hartford, was 55 years old when he was killed in action by a rebel sharpshooter while in action on the Potomac River. He was the first United States' naval officer killed in action in the Civil War.

Commander Ward has a varied and interesting career and was considered one of the most promising officers in the United States Navy at the time of his death and certainly was destined for flag rank. Born in Hartford on September 25, 1806, to Col. James Ward and Ruth Butler, he graduated from the American Literary Scientific and Military Academy at Norwich, Vermont in 1823, and on March 4 of that year was commissioned a Midshipman in the United States Navy. The following year he sailed on the *USS Constitution* for the Mediterranean where he was promoted to Passed Midshipman in 1829. He was promoted to Lieutenant on March 3, 1831.

Returning to Hartford, he enrolled in Trinity College for a year studying science and on April 11, 1833, he married Sarah Whitmore. Three sons were born to the family. He then sailed on cruises to the Mediterranean, the coast of Africa and the West Indies. A recognized scholar in the field of ordnance and naval tactics, he lectured at the Naval School of Philadelphia and while there published his first book, *An Elementary Course of Instruction on Ordnance and Gunnery*.

An early and vocal proponent of a U.S. Naval Academy, it was no surprise when he was appointed one of seven faculty members when the Academy opened in October 1845. He was soon promoted to Commandant of Cadets and taught ordnance and gunnery. In 1847, with the Mexican War still underway, Lt. Ward was given sea duty commanding the *USS Cumberland* the flagship of the Home Squadron under Commodore Matthew C. Perry.

James H. Ward was promoted to Commander on September 9, 1853. Soon afterward, while commanding the *USS Jamestown* on station off Africa, he wrote *A Manual of Naval Tactics*. This was followed in 1860 by a popular work on steam called *Steam for the Millions*.

At the beginning of the Civil War Commander Ward, then on duty at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, was initially assigned command of the expedition to relieve Fort Sumter, but, after such an effort was deemed futile by General Winfield Scott, Commander Ward proposed the idea of a "flying flotilla," which was accepted and he was assigned to command the Potomac Flotilla, which was assembled on May 12, 1861. The flotilla consisted of four steamers converted to gunboats: *Thomas Freeborn*; *Resolute*; *Reliance*; and *Relief*; and four coast survey schooners *Jacob Bell*; *Cam O'Read*; *Cam O'Morris*; and *Currituck*.

On June 1, 1861, the flotilla successfully bombarded the Confederate batteries at Aquia Creek. On June 27, 1861, the *Thomas Freeborn*, *Reliance*, and *Resolute* participated in a Federal amphibious attack on the Confederate position at Mathias Point, Virginia. The attack was led by the *USS Pawnee* and the *USS Thomas Freeborn*. The United States forces landed on the Virginia shore and threw up a breast works of sandbags and were preparing to land artillery when a force of Confederate infantry attacked from the surrounding woods. Captain Ward was killed while covering the retreat of his men with the guns of the *USS Thomas Freeborn* and at the moment he was sighting a canon to fire on the enemy. He was struck in the breast or abdomen by a musket ball and died an hour later on the deck of his ship.

On July 1, 1861, Commander Ward's body arrived in Hartford accompanied by Captain Ringgold of the U.S. Navy and Lieutenant Huntington of the United States Marine Corps. A very elaborate funeral was held. At 9 AM on the morning of July 2, the City Guard, commanded by Captain Prentice, marched with the remains to St. Patrick's Cathedral where Father Hughes and other clergy celebrated a High Mass. The body was then moved to the Old State House where it lay in state in the courtroom.

The casket was with a flag and Commander Ward's sword, and uniform rested on top of the burial case. Flags were festooned above and around it and mourning badges were all about the room. Hundreds of mourners passed through the court room until 4 PM when a procession was formed and accompanied the hearse which was drawn by four black horses and draped in flags, to the North Cemetery, where the body was to be buried.

The bells of the city tolled and minute guns were fired while the procession moved through the streets headed by the Hartford City Police; the 2nd Company Putnam Phalanx, commanded by Captain Alexander M. Gordon; the 1st Company Putnam Phalanx, commanded by Captain Allyn S. Stillman; and Major Horace Goodwin. Then followed a drum band and the 5th Regiment Connecticut Volunteers under Major Chapman, the 5th Regimental Band; Infantry Co. B., Colts Guard 1st Regiment, commanded by Captain William H. Green; Colt's Armory Band; Light Artillery Company A; and the Seymour Guard, commanded by Captain Horace Ensworth. The hearse came next surrounded by the Hartford City Guard. Carriages followed with officers of the State and members of the legislature followed by members of the St. Bernard Society; St. John's Sick and Burial Society; the St. Patrick's Society; and members of the Common Council.

The streets were filled with a "saddened concourse of people" said the *Hartford Courant* and "The tolling bells, the minute gun, the muffled drum, the funeral music of the Armory Band, the reversed arms, the furled flags in mourning, and the slow march of the soldiery all conspired to render the scene solemn and impressive. The flags were at half mast, many of the stores were closed, and many were dressed in mourning."

At the grave site the Episcopal service was read by the The Rev. C.R. Fisher, Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and the Colt Guard fired three volleys over the casket. In the place where cause of

death is to be written in the Parish Register, the Rector of St. Paul's simply noted, "killed by the rebels." The Common Council was more verbose passing a resolution,

"Whereas it has pleased an ever righteous Providence to call form the service of his country in the moment of its sorest need, one of its most patriotic defenders, in the person of Captain James H. Ward, a Commander in the Navy of the United States and a native of this city; and whereas it is eminently fitting that the public and personal merits which have imparted unfading luster to his fame should be recognized by this municipality as it is by the patriotic voice of the country; therefore, be it resolved that we deeply deplore the Divine dispensation which as bereaved our National Union of one of its most efficient defenders, the Naval arm of the public service of one of its most brilliant ornaments, the people of our city and of our country one whose glorious example both as a man and a soldier shall ever be a guide to private worth, public fidelity and unswerving patriotism. Resolved that the members of the Municipal Government unite in a body in attending the funeral services, minute guns be fired and the bells of the city be tolled, and that our citizens be requested to close their places of business during the passing of the procession. Resolved that a copy of these resolutions be transmitted by His Honor the Mayor to the family of the deceased."

