

Follow up to the Civil War book: *If I am so lucky*

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of July 13, 2026)

Linda Culp Holmes gave us insight into the Civil War some months ago when she told of the events leading up to the writing of the book, *If I Am So Lucky: A Portrait of a Man in Perilous Times, 1862-1865*. Now she follows up with some specific actions taken to bring attention to her ancestor, Nathan Allen.

In 2023, Heritage Books published *If I Am So Lucky: A Portrait of a Man in Perilous Times, 1862-1865*, my book about an ancestor who fought and died in the Civil War. I had inherited 52 letters and two diaries written by my great-great uncle Nathan Allen and spent 6 ½ years researching the battles in which he fought as a member of the 142nd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, the culture in which he lived, and the more than 150 people he mentioned in his correspondence.

In looking at every aspect of Allen's life, I also investigated his death from a battlefield wound, and discovered that Allen's remains had been lost. As a result, he has never had a marked grave. After spending so much time with this soldier, I was determined to change the fact that his service and ultimate sacrifice were not commemorated anywhere. That goal was reached on November 1, 2025, when a granite marker dedicated to Allen's service was installed at the gravesite of his younger brother, my great-grandfather George Sterling Allen. A year in the planning, the ceremony to dedicate this marker was the closing chapter of Allen's story. Here's how it came about.

Allen was the third of seven soldiers to be shot or killed while carrying the unit's colors at Dabney's Mill on February 6, 1865, only two months before the end of the war. He was sent initially to the field hospital close to the battlefield, but when his wound was deemed too serious for treatment there, he was sent to the Depot Field Hospital at City Point, VA, about 20 miles away. His death certificate noted that he died of a gunshot wound to the lungs the day he arrived at that hospital. Further research uncovered a document that showed exactly where he was buried in the hospital graveyard: with the IX Corps, 2nd Section, Row 5, Gravesite 6.

I was elated to have found such specific information about his burial and felt confident I could visit the grave site. However, nothing is ever that simple. After the war, the hospital at City Point was no longer needed, and it ceased to exist. So, what happened to Allen and all the other soldiers who were buried there? In 1866, a new City Point National Cemetery was established a few miles away, and all the soldiers who were buried at the hospital were disinterred and reburied at the new cemetery. It is a beautiful place, well-maintained with gleaming white headstones set in a perfect array.

But even though there was a translation document—albeit a very imperfect one—that showed for each soldier the old grave location and the new one, Nathan Allen's remains apparently never made it to the new cemetery. Either his remains at the hospital graveyard were not found, they were lost upon transfer, or they were misidentified. The reason at this point is immaterial. The fact remained that this soldier who gave his life for the Union cause, had no grave.

Fast forward to 2024. Early that year, I had contacted the 142nd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry re-enactors, thinking they would be interested in my book, which had a lot of information about the regiment and its soldiers. Indeed, they were very interested, and their organization's Co. F president, Pat Gray, invited me to speak to the group at Remembrance Day at Gettysburg that November. Remembrance Day is a yearly observance of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address that draws re-enactors from all over the country to participate in their own events at the battlefield. The event also boasts a huge parade of re-enactors, as well as the nighttime illumination of the National Cemetery with a luminary placed on each of the 1,500 soldier graves.

After my presentation to the 142nd re-enactors, I floated the idea of its participation in a ceremony dedicating a marker to Allen. Gray was completely enthusiastic and promised to gather a contingent to participate. But many pieces had to come together before anyone could make commitments: prove that Allen had no grave, find a place to put a marker, apply for the marker, pick a date, plan a ceremony—a million details. At this point, it was just a gleam in my eye, and I didn't know how it would come together, but I wasn't going to be daunted by a few details.

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In conjunction with the trip to Gettysburg, I also made a trip to Allen's hometown. Perhaps Allen had a grave where his parents or siblings were buried. His parents, George and Jane Bronson Allen, were buried in a small family cemetery, which was on the property of one of Allen's uncles— property that is now in someone's front yard. His oldest sister is buried there, as are his grandfather and great-grandfather (who fought in a New York regiment during the Revolution). But no marker for Nathan. I visited several other cemeteries in the Dallas, PA, area where his siblings were buried. No grave or marker for Nathan Allen was found. I knew what I had to do—and it turned out to be a plan that was a year in the making.

First order of business was to apply to the Department of Veterans Affairs for a marker. The Department provides these markers for soldiers with graves in established cemeteries and for soldiers whose remains have been lost. This involved proving that Allen died from wounds received in battle, that he was not dishonorably discharged, and that his remains had been lost. I also had to find someone to accept delivery of the marker and a cemetery that would allow the marker to be installed there, since he had no established grave elsewhere.

After visiting all the family's gravesites, I decided that the most appropriate place to install Allen's marker was at the Wardan Cemetery in Dallas, PA, where my great-grandfather, who was also Allen's younger brother, is buried. I contacted Rich Spencer, the Wardan caretaker, and found that he was only too happy to accept the stone and install it to my specifications. But since the cemetery has no permanent staff on site, he would have to accept delivery of the stone at his home and then figure out how to transport it to the cemetery. Rather than bother him with that problem, I enlisted the help of a local monument company, Back Mountain Monuments, to accept delivery of the stone. No problem. Mike Kmiecik was happy to help.

Both Spencer and Kmiecik had to sign off on the paperwork for the Department of Veterans Affairs and that took some back and forth, but finally my application was ready. I submitted it to the Department on February 5, 2025. Since requests of this nature can only be made by organizations serving veterans, representatives of veterans, or family members, the Department requested additional information to show that I fit one of those categories. I was able to prove that Allen never married and had no direct descendants, but that I was descended from one of his siblings. The marker was approved immediately—only four weeks after the initial application.

The marker was accepted by Back Mountain Monuments in May and delivered to Wardan Cemetery immediately. It was installed at the cemetery soon after that.

Over the summer, the other pieces began falling into place. With the help of Gray, Bryon Black, and Chris Carr of the 142nd re-enactors, we settled on the date of November 1 and a program for the ceremony. Carr, who lives in Dallas, was instrumental in finding a minister, the Rev. William Lewis of the Dallas Methodist Church, to deliver the invocation, blessings, and benediction, and a bugler, Charles Kishbaugh of the local American Legion to play Taps. The fact that Carr was local enabled him to handle several crucial parts of the planning related to the locale.

Meanwhile, I enlisted the help of Keith Nelms, who is married to my husband's niece, from Winchester, VA, to sing "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Nelms is descended from a Confederate soldier who died in a Union prison after being captured at Gettysburg. But he was gracious enough to sing at this ceremony for a Union soldier. I also had a simple wreath with a red, white, and blue bow made by Oak Ridge Floral, and bought a stand to hold it.

As November got closer, I began sending out invitations to various people I knew might want to attend and disseminated a press release to local media. Word spread quickly in the small town of Dallas, as a result, the *Wilkes-Barre Citizen's Voice* printed a story before the event, and two TV stations covered the actual event on November 1.

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As the event approached, I worried about the weather and wondered if I needed to find a tent in case it rained. I contacted Ted Horn of the Richard Disque Funeral Home, and he graciously offered to put up a funeral tent at no charge. It turned out we didn't need it—the day was cold and windy, but there was no rain. About 40 spectators attended the event, along with more than 20 re-enactors from the 142nd and its sister regiment, the 149th, including some civilians in period dress.

I opened the ceremony with some remarks about Nathan Allen, who he was and the fact that his remains had been lost. Rev. Lewis delivered the invocation. Nelms sang the "Battle Hymn" and Commander Black oversaw the posting of the colors.

Gray gave a Statement of Brotherhood with Allen, a heartfelt commentary that attested to the brotherhood that all re-enactors feel toward those who have served. He said, "Let us remember Cpl. Allen at rest under the blue skies of Heaven, guarded by the silent stars that in life watched over him when he bivouacked on the fields or lay down weary and foot-sore on the soil of the Southland. May we, as we stand here by this memorial, remember that it is our duty as re-enactors, family, friends, and citizens to honor the memory of our ancestors, who guarded so faithfully, so honestly, and so well the sacred bonds of fellowship and who preserve the memory of those who fought for liberty and the dear old Flag."

Rev. Lewis gave the Divine Blessing, and Commander Black provided a Statement of Remembrance: "As we remember Cpl. Allen, let us cherish his example as a patriot and one who stood to honor the memory of the defenders of those principles he believed to be right...We honor this true-hearted, brave, and earnest defender of the Republic."

The regiment's First Sgt. was detailed to guard the marker, and one of the women civilians dressed in period clothes who accompanied the re-enactors placed the wreath. Following a blessing delivered by Rev. Lewis, the re-enactors fired three volleys using their Civil War-era rifles. Kishbaugh played Taps, and Rev. Lewis offered the benediction.

In this way, Cpl. Nathan Allen, who will never have a known grave, finally received a marker commemorating his sacrifice, one that was dedicated in a ceremony witnessed by members of the public and was consecrated by a brotherhood of re-enactors. With the help of many interested people, Nathan Allen's story, begun in *If I Am So Lucky*, is now complete.

Copies of *If I Am So Lucky* are available from Heritage Books, Inc. at heritagebooks.com or through Amazon.

Thank you, Linda, for both doing all you did for the memory of your ancestor but also for providing the story for Historically Speaking readers.

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The headstone of Nathan Allen's younger brother George Sterling Allen, his wife Josephine, and two daughters, Hazel and Ethel, with Nathan Allen's marker to the right at Wardan Cemetery in Dallas, PA (Courtesy of Linda Culp Holmes)



Closeup of Nathan Allen's marker commemorating his service in the Union Army (Courtesy of Linda Culp Holmes)

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Linda Culp Holmes, Allen's great-great niece, delivering her remarks at the November 1 ceremony with Rev. William Lewis to her right and the re-enactors of the 142nd and 149th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry to her left (Courtesy of Linda Culp Holmes)

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Re-enactors from the 142nd and 149th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry offer a three-volley salute with their Civil War-era rifles (Courtesy of Linda Culp Holmes)