

## PRESS RELEASE

“The U.S. Army does not leave their dead on the battlefield...never.”

Kenneth R. Bowra  
Major General, USA  
Senior U.S. Military Representative  
To the Netherlands

My name is Brad L. Edwards and I am a military historian. On May 8<sup>th</sup> of 2000 I traveled to the site where the Battle of Milk Creek was fought from Sept. 29 to Oct. 5 of 1879. The battle site is located 20 miles northeast of Meeker, Colorado. This battle pitted 150 United States Cavalry troopers against a similar number of White River Ute Indian warriors. This conflict is directly connected to the Meeker Massacre, which occurred on the same day. Despite the death of their commanding officer in the first hour of battle, the troopers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry displayed enormous courage, gallantry, and discipline in the face of ferocious attacks by the hard-fighting Ute warriors. Shortly after the initial skirmishing, the troopers rallied together and constructed a circular defensive position using their twenty quarter-master wagons. In this wagon barricade, the soldiers and approximately thirty civilians employed by the army would hunker down and fight for the next six days. The Ute warriors took positions in the surrounding hills and poured a deadly fire into the massed soldiers below. On the third day of battle, the besieged men in the barricade were re-enforced by a company of brave Buffalo soldiers of the 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. The battle wore on for three more days until a large relief force of U.S. Cavalry and Infantry arrived causing the Ute warriors to quit the fight, thus ending the battle. In its aftermath, ten U.S. soldiers and three civilians had been

killed in action during the battle of Milk Creek. A total of 42 men were wounded, some seriously. As a testament to the bravery and conduct above and beyond the call of duty, eleven Cavalry troopers were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Several of these MOH recipients received their award for volunteering on a daily basis to fight their way across exposed ground to Milk Creek to provide their wounded comrades with water. Eighteen other soldiers received lesser commendations for their acts of gallantry during this action. The Ute warriors suffered a similar number of killed and wounded during the fight.

I located the landowner and obtained permission to search the battlefield, using a metal detector. Over the next six months, I spent 44 days at the site and discovered over 800 artifacts related to the battle. On October 22, 2000, while excavating what I assumed to be a trench dug during the battle by the Cavalry, I inadvertently discovered the skeletal remains of two U.S. soldiers. This gravesite is unmarked, shallow, and situated on a cow pasture. After briefly examining the remains, I backfilled and covered the grave.

I next informed the agent of the owner of the discovery of the soldiers. The next day I was contacted by the agent of the owner and was informed that the owners would no longer allow me access to the battle site. The owners also requested that I not divulge the discovery of the soldiers to anyone. Knowing in my heart that the soldiers I discovered deserve a proper burial with full military honors, instead of the shallow, unmarked, mass grave on pastureland, I was dismayed but not deterred by the response of the landowners.

In the weeks after the discovery, I attempted to enlist the aid of several archeologists in the professional community. For whatever reason, no guidance or assistance was offered. Then, by what I thought as mere coincidence, I came into contact with a U.S. Army officer. I met with Major General Kenneth R. Bowra in February of 2001. After learning the facts about the Milk Creek troopers, General Bowra wholeheartedly agreed to help in the efforts to properly honor the fallen troopers. Over the next several months, General Bowra offered invaluable guidance and assistance. I can assure you the reader, that the time honored U.S. Army tradition of “leave no man behind on the battlefield” even applies to soldiers lost for 123 years. General Bowra arranged and coordinated within the Army the aid of the Joint Task Force for Full Accounting. This multi-service group of archeologists and forensic experts were established in 1993 to recover our killed and missing in action from the Vietnam War. Their dedicated efforts have resulted in the recovery of over 600 of our fallen soldiers throughout Southeast Asia. With the Joint Task Force for Full Accounting ready to conduct a professional disinterment, I asked General Bowra to appeal in writing to the landowners, requesting their cooperation and assistance in the recovery of the Milk Creek troopers. General Bowra wrote a most eloquent plea to the landowners in late June of 2001, in which he stated: “The U.S. Army has a proud history. You can help, not only to preserve that history, but also to have the soldiers who died at Milk Creek receive the honors so long overdue. The U.S. Army also has a tradition of recovering our dead from the battlefield. This too is long overdue, but now possible.” Sadly the landowners refused the General’s request to recover the soldiers’ remains.

Since the landowners' refusal of General Bowra's request in July of 2001, I have continued to research the Battle of Milk Creek. I have discovered a passage from a book written in 1935 that leads me to strongly believe that the grave I discovered contains not only the two men I unearthed but also the other ten men who died during the battle. I am releasing this information to the media at this time with the sincere hope that the exposure of the lost troopers' plight will induce the landowners to reconsider their position and allow the U.S. Army to reclaim their own from that lonely battlefield. These soldiers gave the last full measure of devotion in the service of the United States of America and deserve an honored resting place in one of our national cemeteries.

The names and rank of the fallen Milk Creek troopers are as follows:

1. Thomas T. Thornburgh, Major, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry
2. John Burns, Private, F Company, 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry
3. Dominick Cuff, Private, E Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry
4. John Dolan, Sergeant, F Company, 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry
5. Michael Firestone, Private, F Company, 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry
6. C. Lowery Grafton, Civilian Guide
7. Michael Lynch, Private, D Company, 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry
8. Samuel McKee, Private, F Company, 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry
9. William McKinstry, Civilian Wagon Master
10. Thomas McGuire, Civilian Teamster
11. D. Amos Miller, Wagoneer, F Company, 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry
12. Thomas Mooney, Private, D Company, 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry
13. Charles Wright, Private, D Company, 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry

To Whom It May Concern:

The intent of this Press Release is to gain public support for the efforts to recover, here on American soil the remains of two, possibly twelve, United States soldiers who have been forgotten, yet not forsaken, by the march of time.