

Editor's Note: Due to space restrictions in the printed version of Bucknell World, we were not able to run the entire text of Michael Dreeese's story about Andrew Gregg Tucker. The complete article is published here.

BACKWARD GLANCE

THE SAGA OF ANDREW GREGG TUCKER MICHAEL DREEESE

The recent release of the critically acclaimed *Saving Private Ryan* has ignited an intense interest in our country's involvement in World War II. During this great event approximately 3,000 Bucknell men and women served in various branches of the armed forces, including one admiral and three brigadier generals. Bucknell's contribution to our rich military heritage, however, dates back to a period when the United States was at war with itself.

The American Civil War ushered in difficult times for the fledgling University at Lewisburg, known today as Bucknell. Enrollment plummeted during the four years of civil strife, leading to a severe financial crisis. During Robert E. Lee's invasion of Pennsylvania in 1863, for instance, the college closed temporarily as practically the entire male student body departed to join emergency militia unit during the crisis.

The war deeply impacted the lives of faculty members, students and the surrounding community of nearly 2, 800 residents. With the passage of time and the rapid growth of the institution, it is difficult to imagine living in such a tumultuous period. This article will examine a small portion of Bucknell's Civil War legacy through the tragic experience of one alumnus on perhaps the most famous battlefield of the war.

The scene described below by the *Union County Star* and *Lewisburg Chronicle* on August 29, 1862, was repeated often in Lewisburg and in other northern communities throughout the war.

"The greatest crowd ever assembled at the Lewisburg Depot, was on Tuesday morning las', when the companies raised principally by Messrs. Crotzer and Merrill took the cars for Harrisburg. They were addressed in town, before leaving, by Rev. R. A. Fink. The companies were perhaps the largest and best that have left Union County ... and will be found the most resolute, reliable soldiers. ... We observed very many spectators in tears — mothers and children, in some cases, of those who were going to danger, and possibly to death — and also strong men, 'all unused to the melting mood.'"

In the midst of this crowd of anxious onlookers stood a middle-aged widow by the name of Margery Gregg Tucker. Mrs. Tucker was undoubtedly one of the many spectators affected by the "melting mood" of the moment. She had made the journey across the Market Street Bridge from Lewisburg to the Pennsylvania and Erie Railroad Station at Montandon to see her only son, Andrew Gregg Tucker, off the war.

Less than a month earlier, the slender, handsome 17-year-old had participated in a far different procession. On July 31, Andrew had marched with nine classmates, accompanied by the strains of the Milton Silver Coronet Band, from the tiny Baptist church on South Third Street to Commencement Hall of the University at Lewisburg. Here, on a wooded hillside overlooking the majestic Susquehanna River, Tucker received his Bachelor of Arts diploma and graduated with the class of 1862. It was noted that this class comprised "several most promising characters, and the best wishes of very many go with them all as they now enter upon the more public and responsible duties of life."

Answering the Call For young Tucker, the most paramount of duties entailed service to his imperiled country, and immediately following his graduation, he commenced recruiting soldiers for a company of volunteers being formed in Union County in compliance with President Lincoln's call for additional troops. The bloody conflict was already over 16 months old, and no visible end was in sight.

It is doubtful, however, that Andrew required any stimulus to offer his services for the Union cause. His family tree was filled with notable examples of civic and military service. Andrew was named to honor his distinguished grandfather, U. S. Senator Andrew Gregg (Gregg Township in Union and Centre counties were named in his honor). His first cousin was Pennsylvania Governor Andrew Gregg Curtin, and two other cousins, John Irvin Gregg and David McMurtrie Gregg, served as generals in the Cavalry Corps of the Army of the Potomac.

Joining Tucker in the recruitment process were George Merrill, Esq., and two former Bucknell students. John A. Owens, Class of 1859, had attended the college for a year before his roving spirit led him into the recently discovered oil fields of eastern Kentucky. He returned to Lewisburg with the outbreak of the war and promptly organized a local drill team.

Another adventurous alumnus, Charles R. Evans, Class of 1861, had started overland for California during the eventful spring of 1861. After the firing on Fort Sumter, he, too, returned to Union County and enlisted as a private in Company G of the 4th Pennsylvania Volunteers, a three-months regiment. The Evans family also was steeped in military tradition. Charles' father served in the War of 1812, and his father had been a captain during the American Revolution.

The efforts of these four young men reached fruition when 89 others from Lewisburg and the surrounding townships joined them in enlisting for three years of service in the Union army. The average age of the new recruits was in the early to mid-20s, although several older men, and two 16-year-old musicians also answered the call. All types of occupations were represented: teachers, students, farmers, merchants, boatsmen, millers, carpenters, blacksmith, shoemakers and other artisans.

At Camp Curtin near Harrisburg, Tucker and his comrades were mustered into Federal service as Company E of the 142nd Pennsylvania Volunteers. During this organizational phase, the popular and intelligent teenager was elected as second lieutenant, while Evans became the first lieutenant and Owens served as the unit's first captain. The tenure of the latter was brief, however, as poor health kept him off active duty.

The Early Days The 142nd spent the first month of its service performing guard duty in Washington, D. C., and later in Frederick, Md. Company E suffered its first casualty when 22-year-old Sergeant Thomas Orwig, Class of 1862, died of disease in a Washington hospital on November 30th. Thomas was the son of a New Berlin minister. He died without ever seeing an enemy soldier.

Meanwhile, Andrew suffered with typhoid fever at Frederick, but he soon regained his health. Remarkably, twice as many soldiers died from disease than from combat wounds during the Civil War.

In early October 1862, the 142nd was assigned to the Third Division of the First Army Corps of the Army of the Potomac, the North's principal army in the eastern theater. The green recruits fought their maiden battle at Fredericksburg, Va., on Dec. 13th, where they were "exposed to a destructive fire ... but with a nerve which veterans might envy, it heroically maintained its position until ordered to retire." In one brief hour, the 142nd lost 250 men from the 550 who had stood in well-ordered ranks in the morning.

William L. Donachy, a young brickmaker from Lewisburg, wrote his father following the battle: "... little did I think that I should live to see another day." Two of his comrades in Company E did not, while 16 others were wounded. This battle is considered one of the most bitter and costliest defeats in the annals of the Army of the Potomac.

Following another disastrous Union defeat at Chancellorsville, Va., in early May 1863, Tucker authored a resolution that was published in the May 22nd edition of the Chronicle. The article reaffirmed that Andrew and his comrades in Company E would not "shirk from dangers and death in defence of our principles" and regarded those individuals who favored reconciliation with the Confederacy as "traitors at heart." This devotion would be put to the test two months later on the bloody fields of Gettysburg.

The Battle at Gettysburg By the time the Union army pushed north to head off Lee's invasion of Pennsylvania, Andrew had been promoted to first lieutenant, and he also served as the acting adjutant of the regiment. Evans, recently promoted to captain, remarked that Tucker "was the most brilliant one I ever saw and was fast developing into a man."

On July 1, 1863, the Union First Army Corps fought one of the best defensive battles of the entire war as it clung tenaciously to the low ridges west of Gettysburg. Under the inspired leadership of General John Reynolds and Abner Doubleday, the outnumbered Federals bought the time necessary for the remainder of the Army of the Potomac to arrive on the field and concentrate on the strategic high ground south of the town.

At one point in the sanguinary struggle, the 142nd counterattacked into General James J. Pettigrew's North Carolinians as the stubborn Union defenders were being swept from McPherson's Ridge. The Pennsylvanians were "mowed down" as the 47th North Carolina "turned on the mass and seemingly shot the whole to pieces."

Mounted on horseback, Tucker presented a conspicuous mark for the enemy riflemen. During the initial volley, he was shot in the right forearm, and his horse was severely disabled. Captain Evans begged and then ordered Tucker to go to the rear. Instead, the young adjutant remained with the regiment "cheering and urging the men by going into the thickest of the fight himself."

Nearby, Lieutenant Jeremiah Hoffman was incapacitated when a shell fragment cut through his pelvis and lodged near his spine. Tucker pushed Hoffman onto his wounded mount and sent him off to the Lutheran Theological Seminary for medical assistance.

The depleted Union regiments regrouped on wooded Seminary Ridge for a final desperate stand before retiring through the town to Cemetery Hill. Here, Andrew was struck by a ball in the middle of the upper back. A short time later, while being assisted toward the Seminary, he received his third and fatal wound. This round penetrated his lower back and entered his bowels.

The severely wounded officer finally reached the four-story brick sanctuary that had been converted into a grisly field hospital. The building was already overflowing with the bodies of torn and bleeding soldiers. A surgeon examined Andrew's wounds and informed him that his recovery was doubtful. "I am a very young man, but I am willing to die for my country," replied the gallant officer.

Andrew clung to life long enough to learn of Lee's retreat and the Union triumph that he had fought so hard to secure. On Sunday morning, July 5, at 3 a.m., Andrew Tucker died. His last thoughts were with his family — "I would like to see my mothers and sisters, but I never will."

Tucker was deeply mourned by his comrades. "Andrew was brave, very brave, and acted well the part of a soldier," wrote Evans. Adjutant William Wilson remembered him as "a friend I prized so highly; a patriot who, knowing his duty to his country, nobly performed it; a hero and Christian, who suffered and died for his country without a murmur." Lieutenant Colonel George McFarland, also a patient in the seminary, declared that Andrew "was regarded with affection and esteem by all his associates."

Captain Evans, who was slightly wounded in the leg, remained by Andrew's side through all his sufferings and attended to his burial in the seminary garden. Lieutenant Hoffman, who may have owed his life to Tucker's selflessness, vividly recalled this melancholy event.

"They roughly lined his grave with fence palings and buried him beside the Colonel. I was then lying on the bunk, and by lifting my head could see into the garden. ... They were holding the body over the grave when the head slipped over the edge of the blanket and lieutenant's beautiful, jet black hair dragged over

the ground. The thought of his mothers and sisters was called up, and surely it cannot be called unmanly that a few tears stole down my cheeks."

A Sad Homecoming After learning of his son's wounding, Margery Tucker, in company with her pastor Steven H. Mirick and Professor George Bliss and President Justin Loomis, started for the battlefield to care for Union County soldiers in the Gettysburg hospitals.

Bliss resided with his large family at present-day 63 University Avenue. The barn on this property, which still stands today, was a station on the Underground Railroad.

Loomis, a towering and sometimes eccentric man of New England stock, guided the university through its darkest hours. A graduate of Brown University, Loomis headed up a scientific expedition to Bolivia, Peru and Chile before his arrival in Lewisburg. He designed and built the home at the corner of University Avenue and Loomis Street, known today as the President's House. In September 1862, when the emergency militia was briefly called out by Governor Curtin during Lee's invasion of Maryland, the 52-year-old academic signed up.

After an arduous journey through heavy rains, including a rowboat ride over the Susquehanna near Wrightsville, the party finally reached the battlefield. It was a shocking scene. The debris of battle was strewn everywhere, marking the lines of the vicious struggle. Piles of amputated limbs were massed around the buildings used as field hospitals, and the stench of decaying horse flesh blanketed the area. One can only imagine Margery's shock and grief upon discovering her son's shallow grave and its improvised headboard upon which his name and regiment was carefully etched.

Andrew's remains arrived back in Lewisburg by the same route he had taken to the seat of war less than a year earlier. J. Sexton James, Class of 1868 and then a student at the university, was among those who met the train at Montandon. He recalled that Andrew's burial case was positioned crosswise on the platform of the baggage car. The body was laid to rest on the peaceful slope of the Lewisburg Cemetery adjacent to the university in the presence of a large of mourning congregation.

The alumni of the University at Lewisburg immediately passed a series of resolutions that displayed their esteem for the brave young hero and expressed their sorrow that one so young had been cut down in the very opening of his manhood.

Lucy Bliss, Institute Class of 1860, the oldest daughter of Professor Bliss, fondly remembered the Tucker family, and she never forgot the turmoil of the Civil War years. In 1921, Lucy addressed the Alumnae Association at the annual commencement luncheon and shared her memories of the summer of 1863. Her concluding words should give us pause for reflection today:

"Bucknell is thriving and prosperous now, but it has seen trying days. I wonder sometimes how many of the students, even of the faculty, realize that the institution, of which they are so proud now, was saved to them during the war only by the self-sacrifice of a body of men. ... All honor to the memory of such

men! Their example should be an inspiration to nobility of character and unselfish devotion to duty in those who are profiting by their sacrifice."

The Legacy Orwig and Tucker were the first Bucknellians to die during the war; they would not be the last. When General Ulysses S. Grant launched his bloody overland campaign in the spring of 1864, Lieutenant Colonel Milton Opp, Class of 1858, of the 84th Pennsylvania received a mortal wound at the battle of the Wilderness from which he would die on May 8. Nearly five months later, Captain James Potter Gregg, Class of 1855, a cousin of Andrew Tucker, was killed near Petersburg while serving with the 45th Pennsylvania. He was the last Bucknell graduate to fall during the Civil War.

After the war, a memorial tablet was placed in Commencement Hall by the alumni in recognition of their fallen brothers. Unfortunately, a 1932 fire destroyed the memorial.

Charles Evans rejoined his regiment after Gettysburg and served with it in every campaign and battle until Lee's surrender at Appomattox in April 1865. Charles then pursued a career in medicine and graduated from Jefferson Medical College in 1867. Tragically, he died later the same year. His brother noted that he suffered greatly from "physical prostration caused by the hardships of his army life."

When Lewisburg Civil War veterans formed a Grand Army of the Republic Post in 1867, they named it in memory of Andrew Gregg Tucker. On August 20, 1873, Justin Loomis married Augusta Tucker, Institute Class of 1857 and Andrew's older sister. The couple named their first born Andrew Gregg Loomis.

On July 8, 1998, exactly 135 years after Andrew was interred in the Tucker family plot, I visited the grave site far away from the throngs of visitors at the Gettysburg National Military Park. The gloomy, overcast weather matched the solemn occasion. I reverently touched the marble headstone, and a few tears stole down my cheeks. I turned and slowly walked down the grassy slope. [W](#)

*Michael Dreese is a letter carrier for the U. S. Postal Service in Lewisburg. His route passes through the historic district of Lewisburg, including University Avenue and the Lewisburg Cemetery. His first book, *An Imperishable Fame: The Civil War Experience of George Fisher McFarland*, was published in 1997. A future project will include a study of Lewisburg during the Civil War.*

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