

# Brigadier General Edward E. Wood

by A. Day Bradley

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Edward E. Wood was a Union cavalryman when not yet sixteen years of age and later became a career Army officer; he was born September 17, 1846 near Goshen in Fulton Township. However, the records of Little Britain Monthly Meeting record his birth in proper Quaker style, 17th of 9th mo. 1846. His father, Day Wood, who was a prominent Friend, ardent abolitionist and member of the Pennsylvania Assembly, gave at least silent approbation, when the son in order to "attain" the minimum age for enlistment added two years and nine days to his age. He enlisted on September 8, 1862.<sup>1</sup> Edward Wood had been a student at Millersville Normal in 1861-62 and was teaching in the northern part of Lancaster County when he enlisted in Company C of the 17th Regiment of the Pennsylvania Volunteer Cavalry. Company C was raised by Captain William H. Spere [sic] of Ephrata. The young volunteer was successively company commissary sergeant, first sergeant and first lieutenant of Company C.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after its organization the 17th Regiment arrived at Occoquan, Virginia, and Company C and two other companies were detailed to picket duty while the remainder of the regiment proceeded



**Elizabeth Wynn Wood**

to join the Army of the Potomac. On December 27, 1862 Sergeant Wood and a sergeant from Company I were in charge of ferrying a wagon train across the Occoquan Creek. Upon learning of the approach of Confederate Cavalry the wagon master told his men to leave immediately. The sergeants ordered the men to continue ferrying the wagons, with the result that most of the wagon train was saved but the sergeants and a few men were captured by a detachment of Colonel Butler's South Carolina Cavalry. They were imprisoned in Castle Thunder under harrowing conditions until a general exchange of prisoners was effected in May 1863.<sup>3</sup>

Family history records that shortly after his release his mother,



**Edward Edgar Wood**

Eliza (Jackson) Wood, visited him in a military hospital. Like her husband, Eliza Wood felt that the preservation of the Union and the abolition of slavery took precedence over the pacifist testimony of the Society of Friends. Neither mother nor son commented on the error in the hospital records, "Sergeant Wood, age 19."

Sergeant Wood took part in the celebrated raid to Richmond in February 1864 under Brigadier General Judson Kilpatrick. On May 12, 1864 he was promoted to first lieutenant replacing J. C. Shults, who was killed at the battle of Meadow Ridge. In August 1864 Captain Sphera [sic] was promoted to major and Lieutenant Wood was placed in command of Company C. He was the youngest commis-

sioned officer of the 17th Pennsylvania Cavalry. At the battle of Dinwiddie Court House, February 25, 1865, Lieutenant Wood was ordered to establish liaison with the brigade to the left of his own brigade. His course took him through heavy Confederate fire and his horse's reins were shot so that the horse bolted toward the enemy lines. He dismounted, tied the reins, remounted and completed his mission. He was mustered out of the Union service August 7, 1865.

In 1866 Edward Wood was offered a commission in the regular army, but instead took a competitive examination for entrance to West Point. He was successful over sixteen others—although he had been out of school for three years—and received the appointment. This was the last appointment to the Military Academy made by Congressman Thaddeus Stevens. The somewhat ambivalent reaction of a former lieutenant of cavalry to the life of a plebe at West Point is indicated in his letter of January 3, 1867 written to his cousin Kate A. Carter of Fulton Township:

It is awfully dull here. . . . The examinations here are fearfully solemn affairs. . . . The presence of the whole Academic Board and the amount of epaulettes and shoulder straps is almost overwhelming to one of weak nerves. . . . The most trying thing to me in cadet life is the unmercifully early hour of rising, six o'clock in the morning!! . . . I like West Point very much indeed Kate. It would be hard to find a finer set of young men than the U. S. corps of Cadets. Military discipline gives them all the manly virtues — honor, frankness and openness.<sup>4</sup>

He graduated sixth in his class of 58.<sup>5</sup>

Edward Wood and Elizabeth Wynn of Chester County were married August 2, 1870 and shortly thereafter he reported for duty at Fort Union, New Mexico as second lieutenant of the Eighth Cavalry. Mrs. Wood was his constant companion, going from post to post, even to the Mexican border, often making the trip on horseback.<sup>6</sup>

Edward Wood remained in the U. S. Army until he reached the mandatory retirement age on September 17, 1910. He had numerous tours of duty in the West varied with assignment to West Point as an assistant professor of French and Spanish. He was aide-de-camp on the personal staff of Major General Schofield, 1879-1882. In January 1886, then Captain of the 8th Cavalry he was engaged in the campaign against Geronimo. In 1888 he participated with his regiment in the march across the United States from Texas to Dakota and Montana, one of the longest continuous marches on record. In 1889 he returned to West Point as principal assistant professor of Spanish and in 1892 he became professor of modern languages with the rank of lieutenant colonel, becoming colonel in 1892. On September 17, 1910 he was retired with the rank of brigadier general. General Schofield said of him:

His career throughout has been marked by ability, intelligence, industry and perfect fidelity in the discharge of every duty.<sup>7</sup>

General and Mrs. Wood's retirement years were spent in West Ches-

ter, Pennsylvania. Mrs. Wood died in 1918 and he died June 21, 1924. Both he and Mrs. Wood are buried in the military cemetery at West Point.

On May 4, 1970, the United States Military Academy had a *Centennial Commemoration of the Class of 1870* to which descendants or nearest surviving relatives of members of the class were invited. It was the writer's privilege to stand when the name of Edward Edgar Wood was called in the last roll call of the Class of 1870.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> There is a biographical sketch of Day Wood (1813-1865) in the *History of Lancaster County* by Ellis & Evans, 863-4.
- <sup>2</sup> *Roll of Honor of the Seventeenth Pennsylvania Cavalry; or One Hundred and Sixty-Second of the Line Pennsylvania Volunteers*. Theodore W. Bean, Philadelphia, 1865, 32-3. The writer has included some incidents from his personal recollection of Edward E. Wood.
- <sup>3</sup> The Civil War Record of Edward E. Wood is contained in the *History of the Seventeenth Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteer Cavalry . . . War to Suppress the Rebellion 1861-1865*. H. P. Moyer, 1911, 107, 120-126, 132, 467.
- <sup>4</sup> Original letter in the possession of the writer.
- <sup>5</sup> The regular army record of Edward E. Wood is contained in *Biographical Register of Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy*, G. W. Cullum, Vol. 3, 1891 and Vol. 6 A, 1910.
- <sup>6</sup> Obituary notice in (West Chester) *Daily News* of September 14, 1918.
- <sup>7</sup> H. P. Moyer, op. cit. 126.