

## IBC #4 Patriotic Instruction December 2019: Visiting Civil War Battlefields is our Duty

By Ross H. Schwalm, Camp Patriotic Instructor

As a young child growing up in Central Pennsylvania, my father, a World War II veteran, would take me to visit Gettysburg Battlefield Park. This was about an hour and a half drive from my home and we would take a picnic lunch to enjoy at a roadside picnic table that were more plentiful back then. I really had no idea what I was looking at concerning the actual battle. I enjoyed seeing the monuments of soldiers especially the ones with a horse as I wanted to be a cowboy when I grew up. I also thought the cannons were sort of neat. I do remember the Eisenhower Farm as a discussion point since I was raised a "Republican". I think my brother and sisters would travel along just to give my mother some peace and quite at home. I do remember my Uncle Ross Thompson attending some of these visits. At no point did my father or uncle mention that I had three great grandfathers among other family members that served during the Civil War. I am not even sure either of them knew of their own connections to the war.

In the mid 1970's, I visited my oldest sister Sue in Arlington, VA and she took my mother, youngest sister, and me to Manassas Battlefield. I had been reading The Golden Book of the Civil War which was a Christmas present from Sue so she thought it would be a good idea to take me to see Manassas. I remember the big battle map on the wall in the visitors' center and trekking out to Henry House. I remember being confused by the two battles that took place there.

In the late 1970's and early 1980's, I completed so many history courses at Ursinus College that they had me take a history comprehensive exam which I passed, and they awarded me a second bachelor's degree in history. As I was focused on my upcoming military career in the U. S. Marine Corps, I completed many courses of military history. I do remember one brief visit to Valley Forge during college but it was only a battle of man against nature.

From 1981 – 1990, my history study in the Marine Corps was mostly amphibious operations of the Pacific Theater of WW II. In 1989-90, as a student at Amphibious Warfare School, we did study and visit the Civil War Valley Campaign and Gettysburg for extensive staff rides and analysis. It did give me the "bug" to visit more. I organized and conducted two staff ride visits while stationed on Okinawa. A visit to Iwo Jima for three days was a real eye opener in the summer of 1992. I followed that up with a multiday visit with my unit to various battle sites on Okinawa.

I returned to Virginia in 1993 and started my Civil War battle site visiting. These trips included Fredericksburg with my father-in-law and my own children. I did a battle study and visit with my Marines from Headquarters Marine Corps to study how casualties were moved by both Union and Confederate armies at Fredericksburg. During the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Cycle starting in 2012, I studied and visited battle sites at approximately 30 different sites in the Eastern and Western theaters. On many occasions, my family was hauled out to "enjoy" my instruction on all sorts of details of my many Civil War ancestors. My sister Sue enjoyed a return to Manassas to include a detailed walk in the footsteps of our ancestors during Second Bull Run.

As an officer in the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, it is now my **duty** to visit battlefields and educate anyone crazy enough to come along with me. I feel bad when I can not attend events that my brothers often organize. I see staff rides as an extension of our speaker's bureau and support

expansion of this “service offering” within the camp for our department. It is a labor of love but well worth the extensive effort I know many of my brothers do along these lines. It is what we are supposed to do.

I was motivated to remind my camp brothers of our **duty** by reading the article referenced here. If she can do it, so can we.

National Review PLUS Magazine | September 9, 2019, Issue, On Visiting Civil War Battlefields

By Alexandra DeSanctis, first published on August 22, 2019 12:58 PM

<https://www.nationalreview.com/magazine/2019/09/09/on-visiting-civil-war-battlefields/> accessed on 12/18/2019 by Ross H. Schwalm