



ALPHEUS S WILLIAMS



As Portrayed by Richard L. Byrd

Alpheus S. Williams was born in Deep River, Connecticut, on September 20, 1810. His father died when he was eight, his mother when he was seventeen. However, he was left an estate, which allowed him to graduate from Yale in 1831, study law and travel extensively. In 1834-1836, Williams toured Europe's many battlefields, visited arsenals and military museums, and acquired a considerable knowledge of weaponry. Although Williams did not attend West Point, he became very familiar with European military history.

In 1836, Williams moved to Detroit. There, he established himself as a lawyer, married his first wife Jane Hereford. Two of his five children died young. Jane passed away in 1849, and he married Martha Tillman in 1875. In the years prior to the Civil War, he served as a probate judge, president of a bank, owner of the Detroit Advertiser, postmaster of Detroit, and member of the Board of Education.

In 1838 he joined the local militia, where he worked through the ranks from private to Major General of the Michigan Militia. Williams also served during the Mexican War. By 1859, Williams was the commander of his militia battalion.

Soon after Ft. Sumter, Williams was appointed Brig. General on May 17, 1861 and his brigade saw action in the Shenandoah Valley, Cedar Mountain, and Second Manassas. In September 1862, Williams led the XII Corps at Antietam when Gen. Joseph Mansfield was killed early in the battle. As at Second Manassas, Williams met and drove Jackson's troops only to be, left outnumbered, out of ammunition, and unreinforced. Forced to pull back he held an advanced position until the battle's end and lost a quarter of

his command in the process.

At Chancellorsville in May 1863, the XII Corps halted the rebel advance on the night when Gen. Jackson fell. At Gettysburg, Williams was placed in temporary command of the XII Corps, which was assigned to defend the Union right flank. Overshadowed by the more publicized events at Little Round Top and Cemetery Ridge, the officers and men of the XII Corps were not credited with the successful defense of Culp's Hill.

In October 1863, Williams was sent West along with the XI and XII Corps to relieve the besieged defenders of Chattanooga. The XI and XII Corps were then combined into the XX Corps. In the spring of 1864, Williams joined Sherman's advance on Atlanta and fought with distinction in the Union victories at Resaca, New Hope Church, Kolb's Farm, and Peach Tree Creek. The XX Corps joined Sherman's march to Savannah, GA, then north into South and North Carolina.

Remarkably, Williams never received promotion to Major General, other than an honorary Brevet, partially due to his poor relations with the press, his affiliation with the Democratic Party and not having the connections in a West Point dominated military. Beloved by his troops, highly regarded and honored by his fellow officers, this neglect is glaring.

After the war, Williams made an unsuccessful run for Governor in 1870, but was elected to Congress in 1874 and 1876. On December 21, 1878, he died in Congressional Chambers of a stroke. In 1921, a fitting bronze statue of Williams was unveiled on Detroit's Belle Isle.



Richard L. Byrd from Petersburg, WV has been re-enacting for over 30 years. He is the founder of the First Regiment West Virginia Cavalry, Inc., which is a living history-educational, non-profit re-enactment organization. He also formed and recruited for the Sons of Union Veterans Camp "Abraham Lincoln GAR Post 1 Camp 1863, Department of the Chesapeake, for which the camp was named for the 1st and last camp to exist in the state of West Virginia located in Martinsburg, WV. Byrd is also a charter member of the SUCVW camp, Camp # 7 Seventh West Virginia Infantry in Petersburg, WV and is the commander of Company A West Virginia Home Guard - Sons of Veterans Reserve unit based in Petersburg, WV. It is the only SVR unit in the state of West Virginia.