



## Washington Soldiers Home Cemetery, Orting

### Cemetery History:

The Soldiers Home in Orting, Washington has been in existence since June of 1891. A cemetery was built along with the Soldiers Home to serve as the final resting place for Veterans and their spouses.

The current site of the cemetery is not the original. According to local historians, the first site was in the flood plain of the Puyallup River which holds runoff waters from Mount Rainier. Due to flooding, Washington State purchased additional land on a nearby hillside for a new cemetery in 1907 and existing burials were relocated to the new site.

In 1909, hundreds of veterans, citizens, and state and military officials attended the dedication of the Soldiers' Home Cemetery Monument in the new cemetery. The inscription on the large memorial stone read: "Erected by the Women's Relief Corps of the Department of Alaska, June 23, 1909".

**Total Interred:** 2,265  
**Acres:** 8

### Medal of Honor Recipients:

The Soldiers Home Cemetery is the final resting place of four Medal of Honor recipients for their heroic actions during the Civil War. It might be expected to find a cemetery with four Civil War Medal of Honor recipients in Gettysburg, Antietam, Shiloh, Bull Run or any of the storied battlefields of the south or eastern states. But this little cemetery in the far northwest corner of the country is truly remarkable as the final resting place for these heroes.

They are (in the order they received the award):

- George L. Houghton, Private, Army, Company D, 104th Illinois Infantry, Elk River, Tennessee, July 2, 1863
- Alexander U. McHale, Corporal, Army, Company H, 26th Michigan Infantry, Spotsylvania Courthouse, Virginia, May 12, 1864
- Albert O'Connor, Sergeant, Army, Company A, 7th Wisconsin Infantry, Gravelly Run, Virginia, March 31, 1865
- William H. Sickles, Sergeant, Army, Company A, 7th Wisconsin Infantry, Gravelly Run, Virginia, March 31, 1865

Incredibly on this hill in Orting there are actually five Medal of Honor recipients, all former residents of the Soldiers Home and Colony. The other recipient, John Warden, is up the hill about half a mile in a family plot in the Orting Cemetery. Corporal Warden received the award for "gallantry in the charge of the volunteer storming party on 22 May 1863, while serving with Company E, 55th Illinois Infantry, in action at Vicksburg, Mississippi."

**Name: George L. Houghton** Home of Record: Brookfield, Illinois  
Date of Birth: August 28, 1841 Place of Birth: Yarmouth, Canada  
Date of Death: February 25, 1917 Burial Location: Orting, Washington



Citation: The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Private George L. Houghton, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism on 2 July 1863, while serving with Company D, 104th Illinois Infantry, in action at Elk River, Tennessee. Private Houghton voluntarily joined a small party that, under a heavy fire, captured a stockade and saved the bridge.

Date of Issue: March 27, 1900 Action Date: July 2, 1863  
Service: Army Rank: Private  
Company: Company D Division: 104th Illinois Infantry

An excerpt from a March 2011 article in the Ottawa, Illinois Times offers some context to the heroic actions of Private Houghton.

“In observance of Medal of Honor Day, a group of veterans and Civil War buffs gathered in the cemetery to render honors at the graves of Lt. Col. Douglas Hapeman and Sgt. George Marsh, both of the 104th Illinois Infantry — known as The La Salle County Regiment.

Marsh received his medal for leading an 1863 attack on an enemy blockhouse guarding a railroad bridge across the Elk River in Tennessee. Marsh, of Company D, was told to pick a squad of volunteers to attempt what seemed a suicide attack across the open and burning bridge.

"Many offered to go, but I took the first 10 who stepped forward, and started for the fortification," Marsh later recalled. "Amazingly, none of the Company D troops were injured and the blockhouse was captured. No one who saw us go into the fight expected to see us come out alive, but we did, and without the loss of a man," said Marsh. Other members of Company D also received Medals of Honor for the deed: Pvt. Richard J. Gage of Ottawa, Pvt. Lemuel F. Holland of Tiskilwa, *Pvt. George L. Houghton of Brookfield Township, who is buried in Orting, Wash.*, Pvt. John Shapland of Ottawa, Pvt. Oscar Slagle of Manlius Township, Pvt. Reuben S. Smalley of Brookfield Township.”

**Name: Alexander U. McHale**

Date of Birth: March 16, 1837

Date of Death: March 13, 1911

Home of Record: Muskegon, Michigan

Place of Birth: Ireland

Burial Location: Orting, Washington



Citation: The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Corporal Alexander U. McHale, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism on 12 May 1864, while serving with Company H, 26th Michigan Infantry, in action at Spotsylvania Courthouse, Virginia. Corporal McHale captured a Confederate color in a charge, threw the flag over in front of the works, and continued in the charge upon the enemy.

Date of Issue: January 11, 1900

Service: Army

Company: Company H

Action Date: May 12, 1864

Rank: Corporal

Division: 26th Michigan Infantry

Summary of the Battle of Spotsylvania Courthouse: The Battle of Spotsylvania Court House, sometimes simply referred to as the Battle of Spotsylvania (or the 19th century spelling Spottsylvania), was the second major battle in Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign of the American Civil War. Following the bloody but inconclusive Battle of the Wilderness, Grant's army disengaged from Confederate General Robert E. Lee's army and moved to the southeast, attempting to lure Lee into battle under more favorable conditions. Elements of Lee's army beat the Union army to the critical crossroads of Spotsylvania Court House and began entrenching. Fighting occurred on and off from May 8 through May 21, 1864, as Grant tried various schemes to break the Confederate line. In the end, the battle was tactically inconclusive, but with almost 32,000 casualties on both sides, it was the costliest battle of the campaign.

On May 8, Union Major Generals Gouverneur K. Warren and John Sedgwick unsuccessfully attempted to dislodge the Confederates under Maj. Gen. Richard H. Anderson from Laurel Hill, a position that was blocking them from Spotsylvania Court House. On May 10, Grant ordered attacks across the Confederate line of earthworks, which by now extended over 4 miles (6.5 km), including a prominent salient known as the Mule Shoe. Although the Union troops failed again at Laurel Hill, an innovative assault attempt by Col. Emory Upton against the Mule Shoe showed promise.

Grant used Upton's assault technique on a much larger scale **on May 12** when he ordered the 15,000 men of Maj. Gen. Winfield S. Hancock's corps to assault the Mule Shoe. Hancock was initially successful, but the Confederate leadership rallied and repulsed his incursion. Attacks by Maj. Gen. Horatio G. Wright on the western edge of the Mule Shoe, **which became known as the "Bloody Angle", involved almost 24 hours of desperate hand-to-hand fighting, some of the most intense of the Civil War.** Supporting attacks by Warren and by Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside were unsuccessful.

**Name: William H. Sickles**

Date of Birth: October 27, 1844

Date of Death: September 26, 1938

Home of Record: Fall River, Wisconsin

Place of Birth: Danube, New York

Burial Location: Orting, Washington (Grave: 4-A-5)

GPS: Latitude: 47.08096, Longitude: -122.22707



Citation: The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Sergeant William H. Sickles, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism on 31 March 1865, while serving with Company B, 7th Wisconsin Infantry, in action at Gravelly Run, Virginia. With a comrade, Sergeant Sickles attempted capture of a stand of Confederate colors and detachment of nine Confederates, actually taking prisoner three members of the detachment, dispersing the remainder, and recapturing a Union officer who was a prisoner in hands of the detachment.

Date of Issue: February 28, 1917

Service: Army

Company: Company B

Action Date: March 31, 1865

Rank: Sergeant

Division: 7th Wisconsin Infantry "Iron Brigade"

The comrade cited is Sergeant Albert O'Connor who was also a Medal of Honor recipient, and who is also interred in the Washington Soldiers Home Cemetery. Both Mr. Sickles and Mr. O'Connor were residents of the Washington Soldiers Home and Colony. The Soldiers Home history notes that along with Mr. O'Connor he was invited to be honored at the National Armistice Day celebration May 30, 1920 in Washington D.C. at age 77. Historylink.org adds that Mr. Sickles attended the funeral of the Unknown Soldier on November 11, 1921.

**The Military Times Hall of Valor notes that when Mr. Sickles died on September 26, 1938, at age 93, he was the last surviving Civil War Medal of Honor Recipient.**

**Name: Albert O'Connor**  
Date of Birth: July 15, 1843  
Date of Death: April 03, 1928

Home of Record: Lodi, Wisconsin  
Place of Birth: Herford, Canada  
Burial Location: Orting, Washington (Grave: 4-A-5)  
GPS: Latitude: 47.08096, Longitude: -122.22707



Citation: The President of the United States of America, in the name of Congress, takes pleasure in presenting the Medal of Honor to Sergeant Albert O'Connor, United States Army, for extraordinary heroism on March 31 & 1 April 1865, while serving with Company A, 7th Wisconsin Infantry, in action at Gravelly Run, Virginia. On 31 March 1865, with a comrade, Sergeant O'Connor recaptured a Union officer from a detachment of nine Confederates, capturing three of the detachment and dispersing the remainder, and on 1 April 1865, he seized a stand of Confederate colors, killing a Confederate officer in a hand-to-hand contest over the colors and retaining the colors until surrounded by Confederates and compelled to relinquish them.

Date of Issue: February 27, 1917      Action Date: March 31 & April 1, 1865  
Service: Army      Rank: Sergeant  
Company: Company A      Division: 7th Wisconsin Infantry "Iron Brigade"

The comrade cited is Sergeant William Sickles who was also a Medal of Honor recipient, and is interred in the Washington Soldiers Home Cemetery. Both Mr. O'Connor and Mr. Sickles were residents of the Washington Soldiers Home and Colony. The Soldiers home history notes that along with Mr. Sickles he was invited to be honored at the national Armistice Day celebration May 30, 1920 in Washington D.C. at age 78. Historylink.org shares that O'Connor was a member of the honor guard at President Harding's funeral in 1923. According to the website 7thwisconsin.org O'Connor was taken prisoner on April 1, 1865. He mustered out of the Union Army on July 3, 1865 as a brevet Captain and is **one of 24 Canadians awarded the Medal of Honor for actions during the Civil War.**