

Forest Lawn Muster in the Meadow
Remarks
May 20, 2010
Buffalo, NY
Speech by BG Jeffrey W. Foley
Commander, US Army Signal Center and Fort Gordon

((Smiled and gestured to the Gold Star Mother seated in the front row next to a US Navy Captain.))

Thank you for inviting me to Forest Lawn Cemetery as you remember and honor our fellow Americans who are resting in this beautiful location in western New York. Thank you Mayor Brown, Senator Thompson, Assembly Member Hoyt, Council Member Locurto, Mr. Jewett, Mr. Dispenza for letting me share this day with you. I'd also like to take this time to recognize Brigadier General Retired Anthony Caruana (Kara-Wahn-ah) and Brigadier General Retired Frank Brusino (Brew-SEEN-no) who are attending, and thank them for their years of service to the United States Army and our nation.

There is certainly a lot going on today at Forest Lawn! Your program of dedications, living history, and history education reflects the hard work and dedication of a lot of people, people who care and want to share with current generations the accomplishments of those who have gone before us in military service. My interest in Forest Lawn of course tends to focus on the burial site of Albert J. Myer, the founder of the US Army Signal Corps, and I am anxiously awaiting my opportunity to dedicate a new historical plaque in his honor. However, before I do, there are some others here that will be dedicating memorials in honor of African American Civil War veterans of the United States Colored Troops (USCT), as well as Elmira Brockenborough, who was the first African American to be interred at Forest Lawn.

In addition to these remembrances, I commend you on your educational program focusing on the daily life of the American Civil War soldier. It is important for current generations to understand how the challenges of being a soldier have changed, or in many cases, not changed since the 1860s. I'm especially encouraged to see that you have some folks portraying signal soldiers during the Civil War period.

As you know, there are seven Civil War Medal of Honor recipients buried here. Sergeant John Segelhurst, 2LT John McVean, PVT Charles Orr, Ordnance SGT John Kaiser, CPT John McCreath Farquhar, Colonel George Love and Blacksmith George Schmal. Men of all ranks, military specialties, and from their names, a mix of ethnic backgrounds that demonstrates a commitment to a single cause – that of serving the flag of the United States.

Other distinguished veterans of the Civil War buried here include Brigadier General Daniel Bidwell, who was killed at the Battle of Cedar Creek, Virginia in 1864. Naval Captain Thomas Budd who was killed in 1862 while in command of the *USS Penguin* near Florida. Brigadier General Ely S. Parker, a full blooded Seneca Indian who served as General Grant's staff secretary and penned the surrender terms at Appomattox. Joining them of course is Brigadier General Albert J. Myer who served as the guiding hand of the Signal Corps during the Civil War and after.

We must also recognize that Forest Lawn is the resting place for the Thirteenth President of the United States, Millard Fillmore, who became President in 1850. President Fillmore demonstrated that through

hard work, a man of humble beginnings on the frontier could make the American dream come true. He was a prominent citizen of Buffalo and chose to be buried in his beloved city, here at Forest Lawn.

During this weekend, you also remember and pay tribute to someone many of you knew very well, Mr. Benedict R. Maryniak, who, through his study of Civil War history became the driving force in promoting history education and honoring the memories of those who fought in our nation's bloodiest conflict. Though I did not know him, the influence of his life is clearly demonstrated by your presence today.

There is so much history here in the monuments and names that make one reflect upon one's own legacy and the impact our lives make on others, today and in the future. Tomorrow of course is Memorial Day, a day in which we remember those that made the ultimate sacrifice. It is a day of somber remembrance of those men and women who set aside their hopes and dreams so they could serve others. Oliver Wendell Holmes called this, "Our most sacred holiday," and urged that we, "not ponder with sad thoughts the passing of our heroes, but rather ponder their legacy – the life they made possible for us by their commitment and pain." Those who we honor this weekend during these many events endured war so that we might know peace, braved hardship so that we might know opportunity, and paid the ultimate price so that we would know freedom.

Thank you for showing your support today and for allowing me to speak to you. God bless you, God bless our Armed Forces, and God bless the United States of America!

Later, at the Walden-Myer Mausoleum:

Thank you, Bob, for that introduction and all of you for inviting me here to dedicate these historical plaques honoring the memory of two men who shared the history of Buffalo and the history of the United States Army Signal Corps. Thank you.

The new plaques that we dedicate today honor Ebenezer Walden and Brigadier General Albert James Myer, who shared a very important connection in their lives – Catherine Walden Myer, Ebenezer's daughter and Albert's wife. This impressive mausoleum was commissioned by Catherine Myer. Its legacy will be enhanced today with the addition of these plaques, which are due to the generosity of Mr. Robert Gilbert, who will address the contributions of Walden in detail.

Albert J. Myer proved that one individual can have an impact far beyond their lifetime. Myer was an imaginative and enterprising military leader, who truly changed the course of history based upon his solution to the vexing problem of communicating information over great distances. Myer was born in Newburgh, New York on September 20, 1828. He received his early education in Buffalo and he briefly worked in the local telegraph office. His interest in telegraphy may have influenced his thinking about the problems of communication while a student at Geneva – now Hobart – College and later at Buffalo Medical College. For his graduation thesis, he wrote, "A New Sign Language for Deaf Mutes," based upon the Bain telegraphic alphabet. He soon became attracted to the adventure of military service and sought an appointment as an Army surgeon which he received in January 1854. He was assigned to frontier duty in Texas where he often observed Indian scouts and their methods of signaling, inspiring him to create a signal code of his own based on his sign language for the deaf. Myer spent almost two years devising a workable visual signal system using flags called "wig-wag." The system could also be employed at night using torches.

Myer approached the Secretary of War about funding and adapting the wig-wag system for tactical communications. Myer was given permission to present his ideas before an Army evaluation board in 1859. LTC Robert E. Lee was the head of the board, which gave the Wig-Wag system a favorable evaluation and suggested further testing.

Myer conducted further tests and refinements, which enabled him to convince Army and Congressional leaders to adopt the Wig-Wag as well as resourcing personnel with the required expertise and skill to provide communications capability. On June 21, 1860, Congress agreed and created the new position of Signal Officer on the Army Staff to which Myer was appointed on June 27th in the grade of Major.

During this period, Myer married Ebenezer Walden's daughter Catherine in 1857. Eventually, Albert and Catherine would become parents to six children, their most valued accomplishment.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Myer and his small group of officers and enlisted men proved so valuable that Congress established the Signal Corps as a separate branch of the Army on March 3, 1863. Always an innovator who sought to expand his responsibilities, Myer experimented with using balloons and a mobile communications system (Field Telegraph Train). In 1866, Myer was reappointed as a Colonel and Chief Signal Officer of the Army.

When Congress established a Weather Service in 1870, Myer volunteered the Signal Corps to make it function, establishing weather stations throughout the United States which relayed meteorological data via telegraph to a central office in Washington, DC for analysis and publication. Throughout the 1870s, Myer became widely known in the US and abroad for his work in meteorology earning him the sobriquet of "Old Probabilities." He was honored by the Austrian Meteorological Society, the Italian Geographical Society, and the Natural Philosophical Society of Emden.

On June 17, 1880, Myer achieved the pinnacle of his career when he was appointed Brigadier General as a result of legislation that elevated the rank of Chief Signal Officer. This achievement for Myer was short lived as he died in Buffalo, NY on August 24, 1880 at the age of 51.

Albert J. Myer was devoted to the Army and to his family. He left an enduring legacy as a man of determination and accomplishment. To the thousands of men and women who have served in the Signal Corps since 1860, Myer is the founding father of their profession. I cannot express how proud and humble I am to stand today in the shadow of Albert J. Myer as the Chief of the US Army Signal Corps during its 150th anniversary. On June 21, 2010, Army Signal Soldiers will celebrate with ceremonies and events throughout the world marking this occasion. I am so lucky and proud to unveil these beautiful plaques provided by the generosity of Bob Gilbert.

I must take a few moments to recognize Bob for the tremendous work he has done to commemorate the memory of Albert J. Myer. As you can see, Bob has invested a lot of time, effort, and money to enable him to portray Myer in uniform at events such as this. Bob is often mistaken for an actor or someone who likes to reenact history, but he is much more than that, he is a true historian who has acted on his passion to the great benefit of Forest Lawn Cemetery, Buffalo, the National Weather Service, and the US Army Signal Corps.

Bob has traveled the world at his own expense to track down obscure and rare documents and photos related to Myer's activities with the weather service. He has graciously provided what he has discovered

to our Branch Historians, sharing these finds so we can expand our institutional knowledge of Myer and form a more complete picture of his life. Bob has a passion, and it is because of his passion we are here today. Thank you so much Bob for the tangible monuments you have given us and especially for your friendship with the US Army Signal Corps. We look forward to your visit with us at Fort Gordon in June for the 150th Anniversary events.

Thank you so much and GO SIGNAL!

