



# Faithful Until Death

*James H. Hillestad, Member No. 6, recounts the bravery of Alonzo Cushing at the Battle of Gettysburg*

**G**allantry was much in evidence at the Battle of Gettysburg, but one man's valor rises to the top. It is ironic that it took 147 years for it to be recognized.

Imagine the scene: more than 12,000 Confederates on July 3, 1863, charging the Union lines on Cemetery Ridge. The focus of the attack -- a copse of trees behind an angle in a stone wall. Awaiting them there was the 71st Pennsylvanians on the right, and the 69th Pennsylvanians on the left. Supporting them was Battery A, 4th U.S., consisting of six 3-inch

Ordnance Rifles under the command of 22-year-old Alonzo H. Cushing.

Cushing was born in Delafield, Wisconsin, on January 19, 1841 and grew up in Fredonia, New York. He graduated from West Point in June 1861 as a Second Lieutenant and was promoted to First Lieutenant on the same day. Cushing went on to be made a brevet major for his gallantry at Chancellorsville.

On the fateful day of July 3, the young major pushed his two remaining serviceable 3-inch Ordnance Rifles up to the stone wall

**TOP**  
Lt. Rufus King, Lt. Alonzo Cushing, Lt. Evan Thomas (back row) and three other artillery officers in front of tent, Antietam, MD

**RIGHT**  
Mortally wounded, Cushing is supported by Sergeant Fuger, No.31197



(the rest of his battery had been knocked out). There, he awaited General George Pickett's Virginians.

At a gasping, stumbling run, Pickett's waves of Confederates mounted the last yards of the rising slope and dashed toward the stone wall. They charged straight into the bullet storm and into the mouths of cannon belching canister. Nothing could stop them. High above the clamor could be heard the shrill Rebel Yell.

The Union troops fought desperately to save their guns. A gray-clad officer planted colors beside one artillery piece, with the triumphant cry, "This is ours!"



**ABOVE**  
One of Cushing's two Ordnance Rifles being wheeled into position, No.31148

**LEFT**  
Union Artillerist Emil Darveau, wielding a handspike, defends the guns, No.31225



**ABOVE**  
Confederate Gen. Lewis Armistead, No.31034

Union artillerist Sergeant Emil Darveau shouted defiantly back, "You lie!" He snatched up a trail handspike and brained the gun's captor.

Down at the stone wall, Cushing's two guns blazed away. Two bullets struck him -- one piercing his right shoulder, the

other inflicting a dreadful stomach wound.

Begged to go to the rear by his First Sergeant Frederick Fuger, Cushing refused, saying, "I stay right here and fight or die in the attempt." And die he did, from a third bullet, which struck him in the head.

General Armistead, who, with 100 Virginians, made it over the wall, laid one hand in the breach of Cushing's last silent gun. His other hand raised aloft his saber, on which was perched his hat. As he did so, a bullet mortally wounded him. He lay there, close to the fallen Cushing, their arms stretched toward each other in grim death.

Pickett's charge had spent itself. It had cracked the Union line, but not crushed it. The Battle of Gettysburg was over. The next day, the Confederates retired to Virginia.

Cushing was buried in the cemetery at West Point. On his headstone, at the request of his



mother, is inscribed "Faithful Until Death."

One hundred forty-seven years later, in 2010, Cushing was approved by the U.S. Army to be awarded posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor. ■



Grave marker at West Point

## MILITARY NOTE

### The 3-inch Ordnance Rifle

This artillery cannon, originally called the "Griffin Gun" after its designer John Griffin, was the most widely used rifled cannon of the Civil War. It was extremely durable, as the barrel was made of wrought iron and, when finished, was sleek and completely smooth. With wrought iron, there was no fear of burst barrels, such as with the 2.9 inch (10-pounder) Parrott Rifle which was made of brittle cast iron.

At maximum elevation, the Ordnance Rifle could fire out to 4,000 yards (almost 2.5 miles). It had a fearsome reputation for accuracy. A Confederate artillerist said of it, "The Yankee three-inch rifle was a dead shot at any distance under a mile. They could hit the end of a flour barrel more often than miss, unless the gunner got rattled."

At Gettysburg, Cushing's battery initially had six 3-inch Ordnance Rifles.

Jim Hillestad is a frequent contributor to The Standard and is proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum. His museum, containing more than 35,000 figures and a large collection of militaria, is located in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania. For directions and hours, call him at 570 629-7227 or visit his website: [www.the-toy-soldier.com](http://www.the-toy-soldier.com)