

ALEXANDRIA

# Gazette Packet

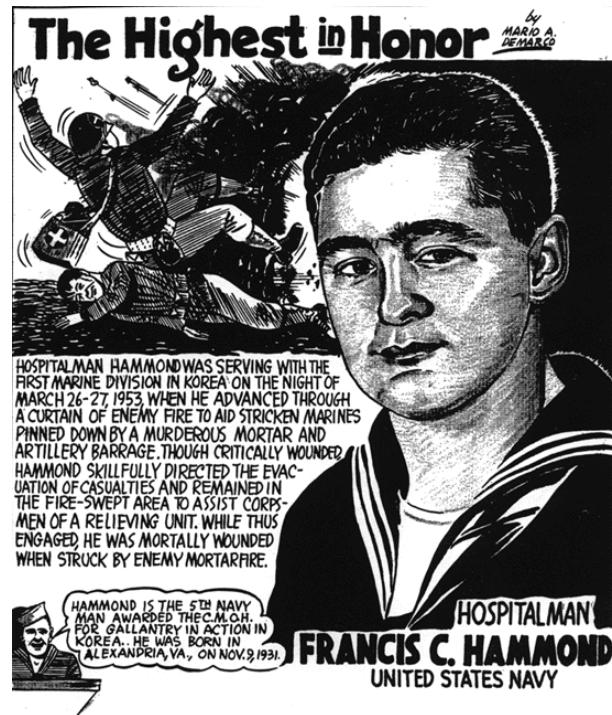


## Alexandrians remember Hammond

by Pamela Cressey, May 1997

*An undated illustration of Francis C. Hammond in the school newspaper by Mario A. Demarco commemorating the school's namesake, an Alexandrian and recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor. Courtesy, Francis C. Hammond Junior High.*

Our nation celebrated Memorial Day by laying wreaths at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the Vietnam Memorial and the Navy Memorial. They are famous places designed to remind people of the cost of war and to recognize the people who died serving America. On May 24, Alexandrians placed a wreath in a different type of place—the gas station at South Washington and Church streets. The wreath is the first public recognition of the Alexandria Freedman's Cemetery, which was a Civil War era burying ground for escaped slaves living in Alexandria. Although the asphalt on the site does not convey the sense that this is a significant historic place, research indicates that more than 1000 African Americans may have been buried here between 1864 and 1869.



We assume that Memorial Day is celebrated at large monuments or famous cemeteries. Yet in Alexandria we have several places at which you can reflect upon the meaning of this holiday. You may want to develop your own tour of the town. Be sure and visit Alexandria National Cemetery at the end of Wilkes Street. It is one of the oldest Civil War cemeteries in the nation and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Then go on to the Freedmen's Cemetery a few blocks away. If you can find a place to stand, look at the Statue of the Confederate Soldier in the intersection of South Washington and Prince Streets. Proceed north on Washington Street to Cameron visit the mass grave of 34 Confederate Soldiers in Christ Church Cemetery. These soldiers had originally been buried at Alexandria National, but were reinterred at Christ Church in 1879.

Then head west to the intersection of Seminary Road and Quaker Lane to the Virginia Theological Seminary. Union soldiers were buried on this corner of the Seminary property, as well as in another burying ground north of Aspinwall Hall. It is believed that the soldiers were later reinterred in Alexandria National Cemetery. Be sure and visit Fort Ward Historic Site and Museum on Braddock Road to appreciate a Civil War fortification and life of the times. Pick up a copy of the excellent map to Alexandria's Civil War sites, including many of the 34 hospitals in which the soldiers died. Then finish your tour at Francis C. Hammond Junior High School on Seminary Lane near 395. Does this site surprise you? Not if you lived in Alexandria during the 1950s and 1960s and graduated from the school!

My thanks to radio host, Katy Daly of WMZQ who alerted me to Hammond's significance and suggested this column. A proud graduate of the LAST graduating class of Hammond High School, Katy can still remember Francis Hammond's middle name. Did you know that the school was opened in 1956 and named after Hammond, an Alexandrian, George Washington High School graduate and recipient of the Congressional Metal of Honor? Fortunately, Hammond's wonderful librarian, BJ Sullivan, has carefully maintained a notebook of information.

On the night of March 27, 1953, Navy Hospitalman 3/c "doc" Hammond's Marine patrol was under heavy mortar and artillery fire near western front outposts Reno, Carson and Vegas in Korea. Hammond had earned the respect of his platoon on his first patrol by putting the life of others above his own: "All at once one of the guys in front stepped on a mine. The explosion blew about three more men off the path as well. The man who stepped on the mine was hurt bad. He was close to bleeding to death. Doc charged through the whole group and when he found that he could not get through the wire fast enough, he ran right through the mine field to treat the wounded man. He saved his first life that night."

Hammond continued with a second platoon and volunteered to stay with a third. The patrol's goal that night was to counterattack Combat Outpost Reno, which the North Koreans had captured earlier in the evening. Sergeant William R. Janzen reported the events: "As we neared Reno, we were subject to intense enemy mortar fire. We kept going forward and finally gained posts in a small shallow trench....The bravest man I saw out there that night was Corpsman Hammond. He was all over the place patching up the wounded, no matter, how slight their wounds...Even after he himself was wounded he continued moving about the area, ignoring his own wounds, and giving as much aid and comfort to the other wounded as he possibly could under the circumstances. He was the calmest and coolest person I saw out there that night. No matter whether a man was wounded or not he always had a few words of comfort and encouragement for everyone. The last time I ever saw Corpsman Hammond he was going back up the hill to assist the corpsman of Fox Company who reinforced and relieved us there...His actions were an inspiration to all of us there who saw and talked with him."

The school crest (donated by the Class of '62) still graces the floor of Hammond's central hall with the motto Vivat Academia (Long live Academics) and is protected by four sparkling brass 3"/50 caliber ammunition shells ("simulated") donated by the U.S. Naval Weapons Laboratory, Dahlgren, Virginia. The Class of '61 Ship's anchor and 1942 USS TUNNY bell stand in the

courtyard. The Medal of Honor was awarded by President Eisenhower posthumously and presented to Hammond's widow, Phyllis, and three month old son, Francis Junior. The citation chronicles how he "moved among the stalwart garrison of Marines, and although critically wounded himself, valiantly continued to administer aid...throughout an exhausting four-hour period...and remained in the fire-swept area... until he was struck by a round of enemy mortar fire and fell,mortally wounded."

Many people today say driving to work is like a battle and feel justified in striking back. But in a real war, Hammond's personal valor demonstrated "exceptional fortitude, inspiring initiative and self-sacrificing efforts...and undoubtedly saved the lives of many...." Can we say the same as we go about our daily "battles?" Perhaps one of the best ways to recognize Memorial Day is by exhibiting such behavior ourselves in the face of our adversities.

Katy tells a great story about that bell- a prank that got out of hand! Do you know it? Call and tell me other stories about your school's artifacts or those "happy days." Listen to Katy June 1 on WMZQ at 7:30 a.m. when we will be talking about Alexandria's archaeology. Does anyone have other Memorial Day tour sites? Would someone like to pull together a tour of all these places?

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