

No. LXVII

**General Alfred T. A. Torbert
Memorial**

BY

GEORGE ALFRED TOWNSEND

Taken From

The Army and Navy Journal
November 13th, 1880

**PUBLISHED BY THE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF DELAWARE**

1922

The General Torbert Memorial

[The following memorial of Gen. Torbert is published by arrangement with the committee having charge of his funeral services. They have chosen this method of publication in preference to a pamphlet issue, believing that it will bring the article more immediately within reach of Gen. Torbert's friends in and out of the Service.]

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

By George Alfred Townsend

The death and funeral of Gen. Alfred Torbert have called the attention of the continent to that old and separated Peninsula on which he was born, who made such mark in the military, social, and diplomatic history of the country.

Family and Birthplace

The Delaware Peninsula, as it is called, is composed of the State of Delaware and parts of Maryland and Virginia. It was of ancient settlement, but a few years later than that of Jamestown. William Penn and Lord Baltimore divided between them that portion of the peninsula north of Virginia, and from the Duke of York's settlement probably came the ancestors of Gen. Torbert. He was born at the present county seat of Georgetown—to which the courts were removed about 1790 from old Lewes, on the Delaware Bay—July 1, 1833. *Georgetown was named for George Washington, and placed near the centre of the country between rills which flowed, some into the Delaware Bay, some into the Chesapeake. As Delaware State was acquired by the English half a century after the occupation of proximate parts of Maryland and Virginia, families from both those States penetrated into Delaware and assisted in the composition

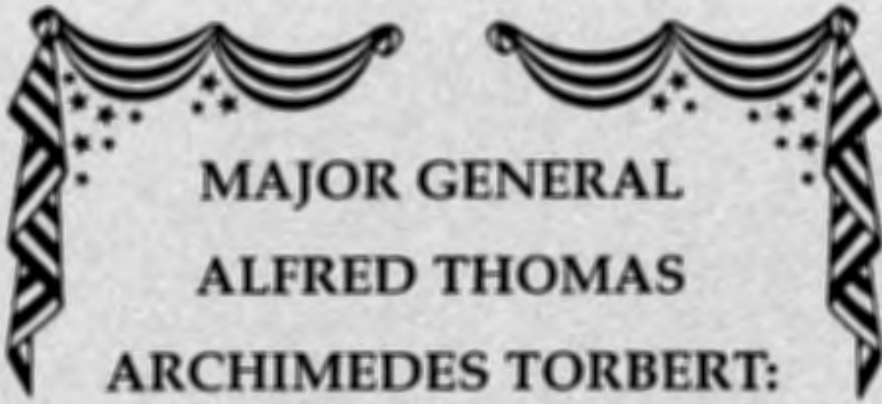
*Also said to be named for George Mitchell, who owned the land.

Resolved: That the thanks of the
Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States
be and the same are hereby tendered to the
gentlemen of Milford, Delaware, for the
courteous hospitality shown the Companions
who represented the Order in accompanying the
remains of Companion Genl. Alfred T. K. Forbert
on September 30th, to their final resting place.

Resolved: That a copy of the above resolu-
tion be sent by the Recorder to Captain
Theo. Townsend, Milford, Delaware, with
the request that he make its tenor known, as
far as possible, to the citizens of Milford, Del.

Official Extract from the Minutes.
Genl. Nicholson
Capt. Co. U. S. V.
Recorder

List of G. Marshall Townsend,
Miford, Del., Apr. 23, 1946



MAJOR GENERAL
ALFRED THOMAS
ARCHIMEDES TORBERT:



Delaware's Most Famous
Civil War Hero

a memorial by
George Alfred Townsend

taken from
The Army and Navy Journal
November 13th, 1880



Preface by Donald Odell Virdin



A HERITAGE CLASSIC





**Major General Alfred T. A. Torbert: Delaware's Most
Famous Civil War Hero**

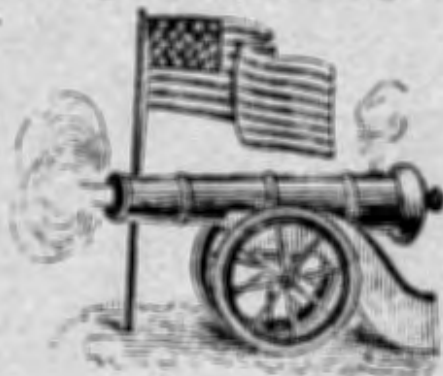
by George Alfred Townsend
with a new preface by Donald O. Virdin

Torbert was born in Georgetown, Delaware, in 1833, participated in the Civil War, served as a diplomat in Central America and Paris, and died tragically in a shipwreck off the Florida coast in 1888. Although some commentary is made on the social and political climate during Torbert's lifetime, the main thrust of this work is on the man's military career.

After he graduated from West Point in 1855, Torbert was stationed in New Jersey as a lieutenant in the U.S. Army at the outbreak of the Civil War. In 1861, Governor Charles S. Olden selected him to be Colonel of the First Regiment of New Jersey Volunteers. He fought at Gainey's Hill, guarded a railroad bridge at Bull Run, and became commander of a brigade at the battle of Gainesville when General Kearney was shot dead.

Torbert led his brigade in a charge against the enemy at Crampton Gap, relieved a part of Sumner's corps at Antietam, took part in the movement against Fredericksburg, and marched on to Gettysburg.

ISBN 1-55613-699-4



PRESIDENT OF THE

(THE)
United States

OF AMERICA



Who shall see these presents (greetings)

I do hereby certify that the Senate of the United States by and with the consent of the Senate the day of

BY BREYER

I read and

change and require all Officers and Soldiers under his command to be to do and follow such orders and the laws and the rules and does

of the President of the United States

of the President

of the President

of the President

IN MEMORIAM.

MAJOR-GEN'L A. T. A. TORBERT.

Born 1844.

Died 1886.

ORDER OF MEMORIAL SERVICE.

ARMY M. E. CHURCH, MILFORD, DEL., SEPT. 30TH, 1886.

Churches Society, Presiding.

Ques: *Marche Funebre.*

HYMN—"From all that dwell below the skies."

Prayer. *By Rev. Jonathan S. Wilks.*

ANTHEM—"Can thy burden on the Lord."

Oration. *By Gen. Robt. F. Stebbins.*

QUARTERS—"Beyond the Swelling and the Waving."

Addresses. *By Hon. John W. Houston,
General A. S. Wade,
Hon. Jas. B. Leffland.*

HYMN—"God moves in a mysterious way."

Addresses. *By Hon. George F. Fisher,
Gen. J. L. Snowden,
Lieut. C. Smith, Eng.*

SONG—"One Sweetly Solitary Thought."

Addresses. *By Gen'l Daniel E. Nichols,
Gen. H. Murray, Eng.,
Col. E. Duval Gordon.*

HYMN—"Sunset Hymn, Thy Rest Thou'rt."

Prayer and Benediction. *By Rev. J. W. Gregg.*

Committee of Arrangements:

General, Wm. F. Smith, New York.

General, Wm. S. Wynn.

Wesley J. Clark, Eng.

General, Wm. Stevens, New Jersey.

Colonel, Wm. E. Porter.

Clark F. Pope, Eng.

Colonel, James F. Tamm, Pennsylvania.

Captain, Reynolds Clark.

W. W. Wickers, Eng.

Richard H. Harrison, Eng., Delaware.

A. B. Kitching, Eng.

1st Lieut. James A. Duesch.

Organist: Miss DELANEY.

Quartette: Miss REYNOLDS, Miss STONE,
ROBERT HALL, CHAS. E. TAYLOR.

Copied from original copy loaned by
Miss Thelma Mayhew, teacher at
Milford School, May 27, 1953.



Photo courtesy of Massachusetts Commandery Military Order of the Loyal Legion and the U.S. Army Military History Institute

ALFRED T. A. TORBERT
as colonel of the 1st New Jersey Volunteers



Photo courtesy of Massachusetts Commandery Military Order of
the Loyal Legion and the U.S. Army Military History Institute

GEN. A. T. A. TORBERT



The General Torbert Memorial

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A Delaware dandy rose to Chief of Cavalry with Sheridan but fell from favor. Gen. A.T.A. Torbert still managed to die a hero's death 15 years after the Civil War

An Unremarkable Life

By GARY MULLINAX
Staff reporter

It's fitting that the very month Delaware's A.T.A. Torbert joined the Union cavalry under Phil Sheridan he developed a cyst on his rear end and couldn't ride for several weeks.

Torbert's military career was filled with missed opportunities and bad luck, along with a few successes (notably at Cold Harbor and Cedar Creek in Virginia). In some ways, his was an absurd life in wartime. He muddled through pretty much the way most regular folks would have, though any man had to be brave to endure four years of the Civil War.

All this is suggested by a new biography, "A.T.A. Torbert: Southern Gentleman in Union Blue," from Morningside, a Civil War specialty house. The author, Anne D. Slade of Grand Rapids, Mich., will be at Wilmington's Smoke Shop today to sign copies.

"I wanted to show him with all his faults," said Slade, whose interest in Torbert grew out of a fascination with Sheridan and the 1864 Shenandoah Valley campaign both participated in. "He was a real person — that's one thing I enjoyed about him. I didn't want to make him a school kid's hero."

No danger of that.

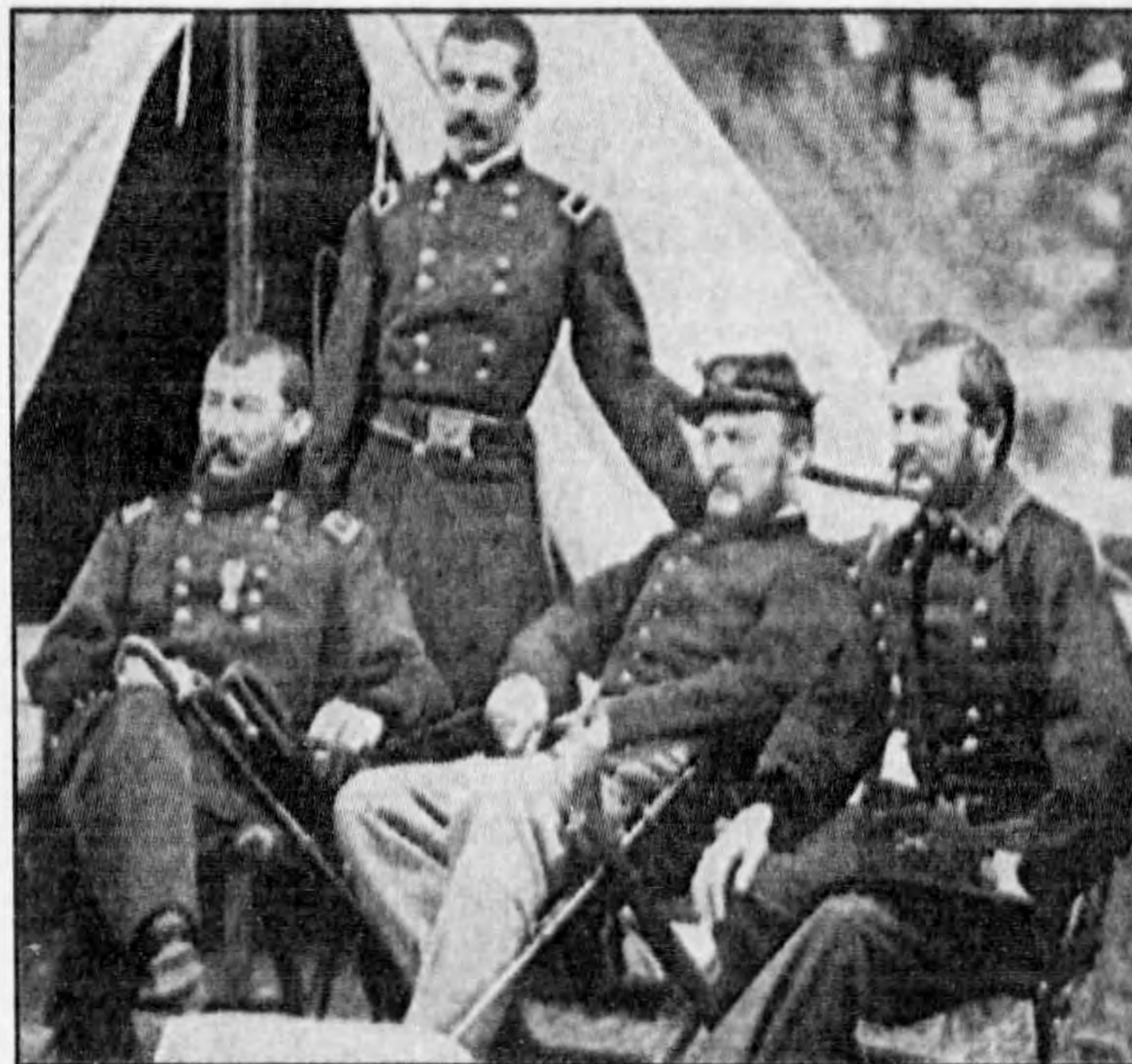
Sociable, sartorially splendid, always angling for promotion, Gen. Torbert got close to some big events but often stayed on the fringes. Through no fault of his, the First New Jersey Regiment he commanded reached Antietam too late to fight. It got to Gettysburg just before Pickett's Charge, which Torbert could watch from behind a stone fence as Union troops cut down the charging Rebels.

Torbert, whose mutton-chop whiskers stuck out on either side of a bare chin, ate his lunch during the charge. Annoyed by what he thought were pebbles being tossed at headquarters by his men, he was informed that "them's Rebel bullets, General."

Torbert was around famous and heroic people without being particularly famous or heroic himself. Think of him as the Rosencrantz (or Guildenstern) of the Civil War, with Sheridan or George Armstrong Custer as Hamlet.

He left no memorable words for the history books, but he did provoke one of Sheridan's famous phrases. "Whip the Rebel cavalry or get whipped," he snarled at Torbert, who had unwisely retreated in a previous engagement. Torbert complied this time.

Sheridan had made him head of the First Division of his Virginia cavalry in May 1864 and in August made him chief of all his cav-



Left to right: Gen. Sheridan, Gen. Davies and Delawareans Gen. Wilson and Gen. Torbert.

alry there. But by September, Torbert had run afoul of the short-legged Irishman, who did not take him to Appomattox, Va., to share the glory of Robert E. Lee's surrender.

He made serious mistakes in two Virginia battles under Sheridan. At one, he failed to pursue Jubal Early's weakened troops in the Luray Valley. "To this day," Sheridan wrote 20 years later, "I have been unable to account satisfactorily for Torbert's failure . . . his impotent attempt not only chagrined me very much, but occasioned much unfavorable comment throughout the army." (This was no way to please the boss.)

Torbert then failed to press the Rebels at Gordonsville. "Sheridan placed another mark beside Torbert's name and laid his plans for replacing him," wrote a historian.

Slade believes some of the fight went out of Torbert because of Sheridan's order to burn and loot farms in the Shenandoah Valley. Torbert followed those orders, but without enthusiasm — one of several reasons his life was endearing no matter how flawed.

To Slade, Torbert's reluctance was partly due to his love of the valley's Southern way of life, so similar to what he knew in downstate Delaware. Nor was burning and looting gentlemanly in the Southern sense (though it sure helped bring the war to a close).

The flashy young Custer served under Torbert in the Shenandoah Valley, but forged an allegiance with Sheridan — they called each other Curly and Phil — and achieved a more secure place in history than his commander. Torbert, who seems to have



IF YOU GO

What: Anne D. Slade signs copies of her new biography, "A.T.A. Torbert: Southern Gentleman in Union Blue"

When: 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday

Where: The Smoke Shop, Delaware Avenue and Du Pont Street, Wilmington

Information: Call 655-2861

ABOVE: Alfred T. A. Torbert as colonel of the 1st New Jersey Volunteers

Photos from "A.T.A. Torbert: Southern Gentleman in Union Blue"

General: Finally some fleeting fame

FROM PAGE E1

been chosen by Sheridan for his administrative skills and ability to get along with his superiors, did not relish taking risks as Custer — or the great generals — did.

Still, Torbert could match Custer in at least one thing — his dress. Torbert, too, was a dandy. He liked to wear flared trousers, a shirt with a broad collar and a cravat. For certain occasions he wore a velvet uniform. He sometimes strutted his stuff along the skirmish line with a full entourage, which tended to draw criticism — and enemy fire.

Torbert, filled with Southern notions about hospitality, wore his finery on the social occasions he found even as war raged. Once, he led his troops through

He sometimes strutted his stuff along the skirmish line with a full entourage, which tended to draw criticism — and enemy fire.

Warrenton, Va., and decided to call on folks he had met there earlier. His orderly spotted some Rebel soldiers and warned his commander, who rushed from the house and barely got out of town alive. "Around him, thick as hornets at the nest, the brigands were pointing pistols at his head," according to one account.

Torbert also socialized on his many extended leaves. He often took leave because of malaria (the attacks often struck when he was under pressure) but sometimes to visit friends and family. This raised eyebrows. "Gen. Torbert ought to be old enough now to be over this sort of thing," said an early commander, John Sedgwick, who granted Torbert's request for time off.

Torbert sometimes used this time to jockey for promotion, which seemed a never-ending task. He was a professional soldier and West Point graduate who transferred to the volunteer army when war began. Though he quickly rose to general with the volunteers, he never got past the rank of captain with the regulars.

TOP BRASS

Other Delawareans who served as generals in the Civil War, all on the Union side:

■ **Thomas A. Smyth.** Born in Ireland, moved to Wilmington before the war, died in 1865.

■ **George Sykes.** Born in Dover, stayed in the Army after the war, died in 1880.

■ **James H. Wilson.** Born in Illinois, moved to Wilmington in 1883, died in 1925.

— **Constance Cooper,**
Historical Society
of Delaware

This was a serious problem for his career at war's end. Sheridan wouldn't help, though he happily promoted Custer and others.

So Torbert retired and joined his wife, Mary, in Milford. They had no children, though distant relations include William Torbert, a Delaware state senator from Dover, and Marvin Schelhouse of Milford, whose collection of A.T.A. Torbert memorabilia was useful to Slade.

In Milford, Torbert grew fruit, ran unsuccessfully for Congress and became bored. He called on U.S. Grant, now president, to help an old war buddy. Grant made him consul to El Salvador (not the best place for a fellow with malaria). He next took a similar job in Cuba and then in Paris.

After leaving Paris, he was sent by Grant to Mexico in 1880 to negotiate for U.S. railroad rights. His ship was wrecked in a storm on the way. He rose to the occasion, according to accounts, moving "like a sunbeam" as he tried to save others. But Torbert himself drowned, his body washing up on the Florida coast.

His death at age 47 made The New York Times front page. George McClellan and other famous people escorted his coffin down Broadway in New York City. Torbert was buried in Milford.

Suddenly, Torbert was a hero, not for his war record, but for a few moments on a sinking ship. And now that the world was watching, he was dead.

Another absurdity, but no surprise to anyone familiar with his life.