

THE SEARCH FOR CORPORAL DOW

By Gene and Linda Solyntjes

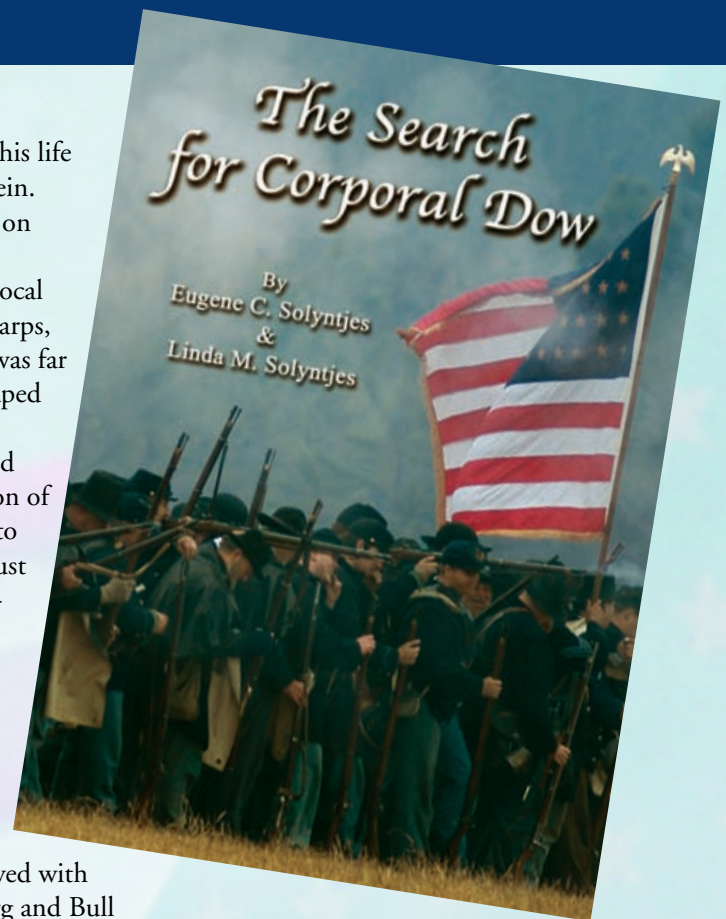
A dozen or so years ago Gene Solyntjes made up his mind that his life was incomplete, even meaningless, without a Sharps rifle therein. Don't ask exactly why; firearms enthusiasts have never been strong on "exactly whys."

A bit of time passed and Gene, answering a classified ad in his local newspaper, found himself one thousand dollars poorer, but one Sharps, New Model 59, Civil War era military musket richer. The Sharps was far from being in pristine condition, but neither was it a wreck...it shaped up as a viable restoration project and Gene set out to do just that.

A curious addition to the buttstock of the Sharps was an inlaid septagon (seven-sided) emblem that appeared to carry an inscription of some sort. Under a strong light Gene and the gunsmith were able to read "Wm H Dow, Co "K", USVV." The restoration project had just opened a second front...who was Wm. H. Dow? While the restoration of the Sharps proceeded apace, and involved a number of gunsmiths and restorers, Gene and Linda found themselves being drawn more and more into their research of William Dow. They were to learn that Corporal Wm. H Dow had served in the 2nd Wisconsin Regiment of the famed Iron Brigade of the Union Army. He had been born in Chemung county, NY in 1841 and shortly thereafter his family moved to Wisconsin. In June of 1861 he was mustered into the Army for a three year enlistment. He served with distinction in a number of battles including Gainesville, Gettysburg and Bull Run and was mustered out of the service in June of 1864 at Madison, Wisconsin. He entered the Minnesota Old Soldiers Home in June of 1927 and died in a Minnesota hospital in December of that year.

All the work on both the rifle and the provenance of the former owner by Gene and Linda were at least partially rewarded when they brought the rifle and their now-extensive documentation to a nearby appearance of the popular TV program "Antique Road Show" and the show's antique arms expert, in deference to the extensive body of information on Corporal Dow appraised the once-\$1000 rifle and its documentation at \$25,000.

Gene and Linda Solyntjes then spent about three years writing their book, which tells the reader all that he or she needs to know about researching just about any US firearm as well as the genealogy of any person who ever served in the United States armed forces (back to the French and Indian War.) There are literally hundreds of sites on the Internet to assist the researcher; it's merely a matter of knowing where to go...and a CD is included with their book making that a lot easier. Their book is a hardcover, full size publication with over 200 pages and some 48 black and white photos and 16 full color photos. Chapter titles include: The Sharps with a Septagon...Searching the Internet...Researching Firearms...Fakes, Frauds and Forgeries...History and Antique Firearms in My Own Back Yard...What Happened at the Little Big Horn, and After...The Tale of a Firearm With a High Provenance...A Journey of Discovery...State Records Sources... Roadblocks, Dead Ends and Professional Help...US Made Firearms...Miscellaneous Web Sites...US Military Arms...Bibliography.



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