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# TO LIGHT!



## Bringing Masonic Education To Light

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### The Day the War Stopped

Up the steep hill they trudged, sweating in the sticky June heat, staggering under the weight of the coffin, the white flag of truce flying before them in the hot summer sun. The guns of their federal gunboat, the USS Albatross, anchored in the Mississippi off Bayou Sara, fell silent behind them as the ship's surgeon and two officers struggled toward St. Francisville atop the hill.

The procession was not an impressive one, certainly not an unusual event in the midst of a bloody war, and it would no doubt have escaped all notice but for one fact, this was the day the war stopped, if only for a few mournful moments.

Lt. Commander John E. Hart, the federal commander of the Albatross, was a valiant naval officer whose skill and bravery were renowned. Commander Hart would have even more lasting impact through his death, which occurred as the Albatross lay at anchor near Bayou Sara, having shelled both that low-lying port settlement and the city of St. Francisville atop the bluffs.

Masonic and U.S. Naval records list Hart as having "suicide," died by his own hand "in a fit of delirium." Perhaps he suffered from dementia induced by yellow fever, for a mere four days earlier he had certainly exhibited no depression or despair in a letter home.

Hart was a Mason, and aboard his ship were other officers also "members of the Craft," desirous of burying their commander ashore rather than consigning the remains to the river waters. A boat was sent from the Albatross under a flag of truce to ascertain if there were any Masons in the town of St. Francisville.

Now it just so happened that the two brothers named White were living near the river and they were Masons. They informed the little delegation that there was indeed a Masonic lodge in the town, in fact one of the oldest in the state, Feliciana Lodge No. 31. Its Master was absent, serving in the Confederate Army and its Senior Warden, W.W. Leake, was likewise engaged. But, according to Masonic correspondence, "Brother Leake's headquarters were in the saddle," he was reported to be in the vicinity, and he was soon found and persuaded to honor the request. As a soldier, Leake reportedly said "He considered it his duty: to permit burial of a deceased member of the armed forces of any government, even one presently at war with his own, and as a Mason, he knew it to be his duty to accord Masonic burial to the remains of a brother Mason without taking into account the nature of their relations in the outer world."

The surgeon and officers of the USS Albatross, struggling up from the river with Hart's body, were met by W.W. Leake, the White brothers and other members of the Masonic lodge. In the procession was also a squad of Marines at trail arms. They were met at Grace Episcopal Church by the Reverend Mr. Lewis, Rector, and with full Episcopal and Masonic services, Commander John E. Hart was laid to rest in the Masonic burial lot in Grace's peaceful cemetery, respect being paid by Union and Confederate soldiers alike. And soon the war resumed.

But for one brief touching moment, the war had stopped at St Francisville.

(Source: Re-enactment Brochure, St. Francisville, LA)