

William James Knight



Born	January 24, 1837 Apple Creek, Ohio
Died	September 26, 1916 (aged 79) Stryker, Ohio
Place of burial	Oakwood, Cemetery, Stryker, Ohio
Allegiance	United States of America
Service/branch	United States Army (POW)
Years of service	1861 - 1864
Rank	Private
Unit	Company E, 21 st Ohio Infantry
Battles/wars	American Civil War
Awards	Medal of Honor

William James Knight (January 24, 1837–September 26, 1916) was one of the first recipients of the Medal of Honor, a new military award first presented by the United States Department of War to six Union Army soldiers who participated in the Great Locomotive Chase in 1862 during the American Civil War (1861–1865).

Knight was born in East Union Township, Wayne County, Ohio, to Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Knight. Knight's parents died before he was five years old, and he was raised by his grandfather, Jacob Knight. In 1852, he moved to Farmer Township in Defiance County, Ohio. It is claimed Knight worked at his grandfather's sawmill, where he learned about steam engines and things mechanical.

On August 29, 1861, at age 24, Knight enlisted as a private in Company E, 21st Ohio Volunteer Infantry at Defiance, Ohio, for three years of service. He was mustered in on September 19, 1861, at Findlay, Ohio. The next month, Knight was detailed as a first class sapper (combat engineer). He was admitted to a hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio during the months of November and December of 1861.

On April 12, 1862, Knight participated in the Andrews Raid. Knight was the engineer of the stolen locomotive, The General. Following the wild 87-mile Great Locomotive Chase, the Raiders were captured and imprisoned. Eight Raiders executed by hanging in Atlanta in June of 1862. On October 16, 1862, Knight and seven other Raiders escaped to avoid the gallows, reaching Union lines at Somerset, Kentucky on November 25. On December 1, 1862, Knight returned to his regiment.

He was transferred to Company G, 115th Ohio Volunteer Infantry on March 13, 1863 and spent July and August 1863 home on furlough.

Knight received the Medal of Honor in September of 1863. He was discharged from service on September 27, 1864 mustered out the following day.

Knight's Post-War Years • August 30, 1868—Married Emma Oldfield at Defiance on August 30, 1868. They had six children. He worked as a railroad mechanic at Logansport, Ind., and as an engineer on the Pennsylvania Panhandle Railroad.

In 1886, Knight moved to Stryker and gave public lectures on the Andrews Raid. In June 1886, he received a pension for his military service and for hearing loss suffered at the Battle of Stones River, Tennessee in 1886.

In November 1886 he attended the first reunion of survivors of the Andrews Raid at McComb and Findlay. In 1887, Knight became agent for the sale of William Pittenger's book on the Andrews Raid. In 1896, Knight purchased his final home at 102 East Allison Street in Stryker and opened a general repair shop in Stryker in June of 1903. In April of 1912, Knight attended the final Andrews Raiders reunion at Findlay. In 1914, the surviving Raiders agree to act in a film about the Andrews Raid; the movie never transpired.

On September 26, 1916, William J. Knight passed away at his home and was buried at Oakwood Cemetery, Stryker.

Citation

One of the 19 of 22 men (including 2 civilians) who, by direction of Gen. Mitchell (or Buell), penetrated nearly 200 miles south into enemy territory and captured a railroad train at Big Shanty, Ga., in an attempt to destroy the bridges and track between Chattanooga and Atlanta.