



USACE folks in Iraq have famous persons from America's past in family trees

By John Connor
Gulf Region South District

TALLIL, Iraq – Maybe you have to come to a military base in southern Iraq to find three people in such close proximity who are related to different famous people from the annals of American history.



Rebecca Wingfield, a project engineer with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, counts Robert E. Lee as her great, great, great uncle. "I think it's three greats," she said, noting proudly that Lee was an engineer officer.



Then there is the S-3 of the Corps' Gulf Region South District, Lt. Col. Doran Warner, whose great, great, great, great grandfather was Seth Warner, a leader of the famous Green Mountain Boys and a Revolutionary War hero.



And let's not overlook the GRS S-2, Capt. Bill Delucchi, whose relatives include Aaron Burr and Patrick Henry.

Lee is perhaps the most celebrated general in American history, all the more remarkable because his generalship was exercised on behalf of the Confederate States of America against the United States of America. Called by Theodore Roosevelt "the very greatest of all the great captains that the English-speaking people have brought forth," Lee first achieved prominence as an engineer officer in the Mexican-American War. He went on to become superintendent of West Point, from which he graduated without a single demerit.

Wingfield noted that Lee was offered command of the U.S. Army but turned down the offer and resigned his commission to offer his services to his native Virginia. "It wasn't about slavery for him," said Wingfield. "It was about states' rights." Indeed, Lee never owned slaves and freed those from his late-father-in-law's estate before Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. The book "April 1865: The Month That Saved America" by Jay Winik credits Lee with preventing a protracted guerrilla war after defeat of standing Confederate armies by adopting a stance of reconciliation.

Wingfield also is related to another Confederate general, Sterling Price, who led the remnants of his last Civil War command to Mexico rather than surrender. He served as a member of the House of Representatives and as governor of Missouri before the Civil War.

Warner's famous forbearer, Seth Warner, was a cousin of Ethan Allen, the founder of the Green Mountain Boys.

The group was created to fend off New York encroachment on Vermont and acted as Vermont militia before the Revolutionary War. Warner headed the Green Mountain Boys during the Revolution and served with distinction in several notable battles.

Lt. Col Warner's first name, Doran, by the way, was picked by his mother from an article about a pilot of that name who flew Dwight Eisenhower when he was president and had a heart attack and passed away in the early years of Eisenhower's presidency.

Capt. Delucchi's family tree includes both Burr and Henry. Burr was the third vice president of the United States. He also was the man who mortally wounded Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury, in one of the nation's most famous duels. Henry was the renowned Virginia patriot who declared, "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death."

When asked about the famous members of his family, Capt. Delucchi commented: "It really doesn't matter how many important figures are in our families, and it really doesn't matter where our families come from. What matters most is the dream they fought, and sometimes died, to defend, and the hope in the preservation of those ideals for all who follow."

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