

**A MALTESE HERO OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR; Orlando Emanuel Caruana**  
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When Abraham Lincoln became the first Republican president of the United States of America after having won the election of 1860, he publically pledged to bring an end to slavery. Seven slave states in the Deep South did not agree and formed a new nation which they called the Confederate States of America.

The war was triggered when the Confederates attacked Fort Sumter in Charleston Bay, South Carolina on April 12, 1861, claiming this United States fort as their own. The Confederate army had opened fire on the federal garrison and forced it to lower the American flag in surrender. Lincoln had no other option but to call out the militia and mobilise the army to suppress this insurrection.

The war lasted until the spring of 1865 when all the principal Confederate armies surrendered, and Union cavalry captured the fleeing Confederate President Jefferson Davis in Georgia on May 10<sup>th</sup> of that year. Resistance collapsed and the war that had cost the nation some 625,000 lives came to an end.

One of my earlier articles in the Sunday Times of Malta had featured Maltese who had enlisted and fought in the ranks of British Colonial and Dominion armies, in particularly during the First World War. One soldier was different; for he had served in the American Union Army during the Civil War.

Orlando Emanuel Caruana was born in Valletta on June 23, 1844. Little is known about him and his family. At the age of sixteen he emigrated or acquired a working passage to America on one of the sailing ships that crossed the Atlantic Ocean and decided to take a chance on a better life so far away from his native home.

His work and where he lived are not clear but what is certain is that some time in 1861, he was in New York City and enlisted in the army. Whether it was as an act of duty or employment problems, on August 7, 1861 Orlando lied about his age and enlisted as a Private in the army. During October he was posted to the newly raised 51<sup>st</sup> New York Regiment, or "Shepard Rifles". Service was for three years and once the term expired, those entitled were discharged but were preferred to continue serving as Veteran Volunteers. His unit was assigned to the 2nd Brigade, 9th Army Corps "The Wandering Corps".

Large battles were being fought in which thousands of men were dying on both sides. The Battle of New Bern on March 14, 1862, was the second of three major engagements on the North Carolina coast in the second year of the Civil War. On February 7 and 8, Union troops under General Ambrose Burnside captured the strategic Roanoke Island, thereby securing control of the sound region. Caruana's Company K, part of the 51<sup>st</sup> N.Y. Infantry, attacked along the railway line. Suddenly the company found itself in a clearance looking straight into nearby Confederate redans. The Confederates opened fire on the exposed Yankees, yet the 51<sup>st</sup> advanced and returned fire but took heavy casualties. During this exchange the Colour Sergeant was wounded and fell. Private Caruana seized the regimental flag and helped the Colour Sergeant off the battlefield. The Regimental Colours served as a means of identifying units on the battlefield and men were trained to follow their Colours in battle, to "rally" around them and generally to use them to maintain unit cohesiveness. Unit Colours were a great source of pride, and victories or defeats were often expressed in terms of Colours being captured from or lost to the enemy. Even then, however units which lost their Colours remained intact and continued to fight. The Battle of New Berne had cost the 51<sup>st</sup> New York

one officer and eighteen enlisted men killed and four officers including Lieutenant Colonel Potter and sixty-four enlisted men wounded. It was the greatest loss of any regiment in the battle.

The Battle of South Mountain was fought September 14, 1862, as part of the Maryland Campaign. Three pitched battles were fought for the possession of three South Mountain passes; Crampton's, Turner's, and Fox's Gaps. The Union Army of the Potomac commanded by Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan needed to pass through these gaps in pursuit of Confederate General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Despite being significantly outnumbered, Lee's army delayed McClellan's advance for a day before withdrawing. Although the gallantry of Maltese men in battle was not made widely known prior to the First World War and even later, it is a true fact that many were great fighters and had performed heroic deeds. Caruana must have been such a man as during the battle, he was one of four soldiers who volunteered to scout and determine the position of the enemy and their movements at Fox's Gap. Engaged, fired upon by the enemy and wounded, and in which his three companions were killed, Caruana managed to escape, rejoin his command in safety and bring back vital information.

His military service indicates that he fought at Roanoke, Virginia; New Bern, North Carolina; Kellys' Ford, Virginia; Second Bull Run, Virginia; South Mountain, Maryland; Antietam, Maryland; and the Battle of the Wilderness in Spotsylvania County, Virginia. It was at this last battle, that Caruana then a Sergeant, was severely wounded and honorably discharged from the army at New York City in September 6, 1864.

Orlando Caruana was married to Frances Marion 'Fanny' Harvey and had three children: Madeline, E. Mortimer and Edgar E. Frances apparently died and he then married Mary Catherine Fullerton of Pennsylvania. His daughter later married Wilmer E. Bowen. Mortimer became a professor of dance, and Edgar a newspaper publisher in northern Virginia.



The first formal system for rewarding acts of individual gallantry by the fighting men of the United States of America was established by General George Washington on August 7, 1782. No medal went with the honor. After the Mexican-American War (1846-48), the award was discontinued, which meant there was no military award with which to recognize the nation's fighting men. Early in the Civil War, a medal for individual valour was proposed to General-in-Chief of the Army Winfield Scott, but he felt that awarding medals was 'too European' and killed the idea.

*Medal of Honor awarded to Caruana.*

The medal found support in the Navy where it was felt that recognition of courage in strife was needed and was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on December 21, 1861. Shortly afterward a resolution similar in wording was introduced on behalf of the Army. Signed into law July 12, 1862, the measure provided for awarding a medal of honour "to such noncommissioned officers and privates as shall most distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action, and other soldier-like qualities, during the present insurrection." Although it was created for the Civil War, Congress made the Medal of Honor a permanent decoration in 1863. 1522 were awarded during the American Civil War. The Congressional Medal of

Honor is to the Armed Forces of the United States of America as is the Victoria Cross to the British Armed Forces.

Twenty-six years later, on November 14, 1890, then aged 46, Caruana was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his two counts of courage and heroism at New Bern, N.C., 14 March 1862 and at South Mountain, MD., 14 September 1862. The only soldier awarded two Medals of Honor in the Civil War was Tom Custer who received both medals in 1865 for separate incidents days apart in April 1862. It sounds odd that Caruana was awarded only one medal for the two acts an honour for Malta to have one of her sons awarded such a distinguished decoration.

Orlando Emanuel Caruana died at New York City on September 14, 1917 at the age of 73. His funeral was held at St. Martin's Church and is buried at Plot: Sec. 3, Lot 33, Mount Olivet Cemetery, Washington, District of Columbia, USA. It is unfortunate that until the time of writing, a photo of him could not be traced.

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### Illustrations:



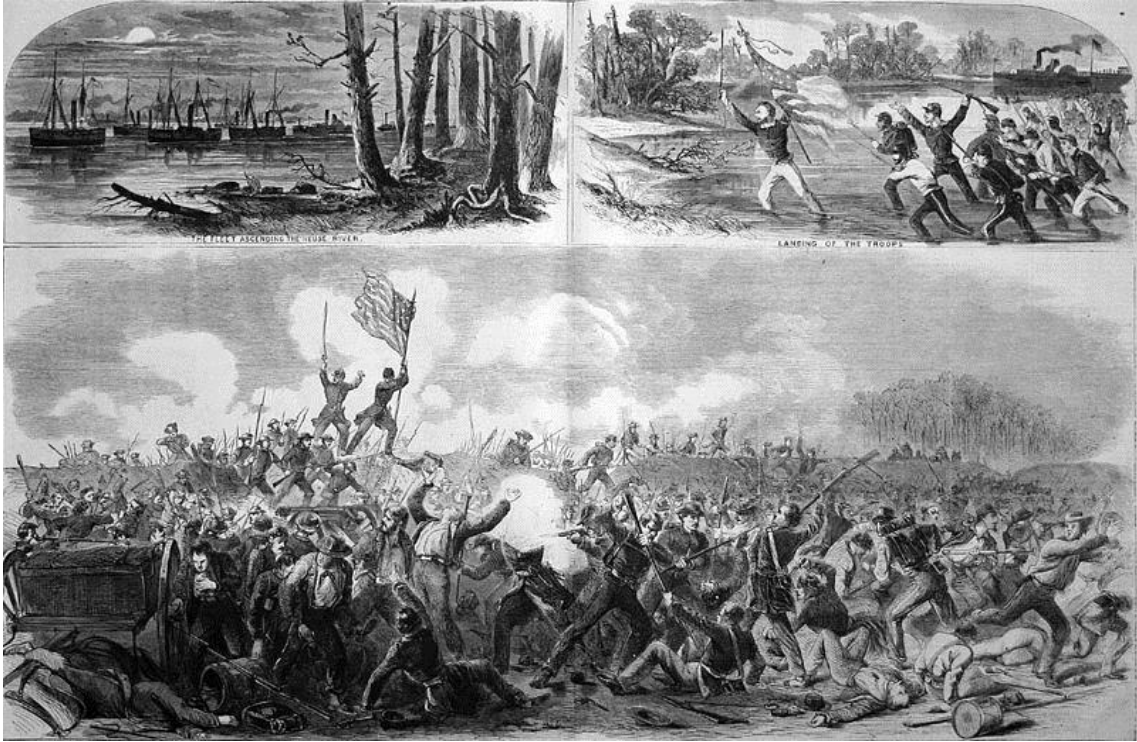
Regimental Colours and Flank Marker of the 51<sup>st</sup> New York Infantry Regiment.  
(New York State Military Museum and Veterans research Centre)



Left: Caruana's grave, Mount Olivet Cemetery,  
(Tim Evanson)

Right: As Caruana would have looked in uniform.  
(Sgt. Schuyler I. Murden, H Coy., 51<sup>st</sup> N.Y.  
Infantry)  
(New York State Military Museum and Veterans  
Research Centre)





The Battle of New Bern North Carolina, 1862, (Harper's Weekly April 5, 1862)



Battle of South Mountain, 1862, (Library of Congress, USA)