by Rebecca Robbins

In order to recognize the herioc acts of soldiers fighting in the Civil War, public opinion favored the establishment of a medal of honor. On 12 July 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed an act of Congress authorizing the award of Medals of Honor to those enlisted men of the Army and Voluntary Forces who "shall most distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action, and other soldierlike qualities." The first Army Medals of Honor were awarded by Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton on 25 March 1863.

Pvt. Morgan D. Lane was the first member of the Signal Corps to be awarded the Medal of Honor. He was born in Monroe, New York, sometime in the mid-1840s. Before joining the Army, he was a farm worker. His military service began on 22 August 1862 when he enlisted in Company I, 5th Michigan Cavalry at Allegany, Michigan. In March 1864, Lane transferred to the Signal Corps and was appointed a second-class private as of 1 April 1864. Lane served with the Army of the Potomac and, in November 1864, was assigned to the V Army Corps. While attached to the V Corps headquarters as the orderly of Lt. P. H. Niles, Lane performed the feat for which he received his medal. Niles reported the incident this way:

> On the 6th of April, 1865, near Jetersville, Va., in company with Captain Benyaurd, U. S. Engineers, and my orderly, Private Lane, and in advance of the army, we pursued and captured 7 rebels, viz, 2 naval officers, 1 engineer, 1 acting signal officer (all of the rebel gun-boat Nansemond), and 3 enlisted men. The flag of the gun-boat Nansemond was secured from one of these enlisted men by Second-Class Private Morgan D. Lane, U. S. Signal Corps.

The CSS *Nansemond,* a small wooden steamer of the James River Squadron, had been burned on 4 April 1865 to avoid its capture by the Union forces occupying Richmond. Three days after Lane captured the *Nansemond's* flag, General Lee surrendered to General Grant at Appomattox, thus bringing the war to an end.

Lane was honorably discharged on 24 June 1865. After some delay, his medal was issued on 16 March 1866, making him the only member of the Signal Corps to win the award for service during the Civil War. After leaving the Army, Lane returned to Michigan, and eventually entered the insurance business. His health was poor, however, and he died at an early age in June 1892 at Atchison, Kansas.

Since the Civil War, a system of decorations has been created in which the Medal of Honor stands at the top as the highest military award given to an individual for bravery. Only four other persons have been presented the Medal of Honor for deeds accomplished while serving with the Signal Corps: Will Croft Barnes, Charles E. Kilbourne, Gordon Johnston, and Adolphus Greely. Although Lane's exploit may not be particulary spectacular in terms of the standards later applied to recipients of the Medal of Honor, the capture of a battle flag was a significant feat and was one of the actions for which the Medal of Honor was most frequently awarded to Civil War soldiers. Today, at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, Lane Avenue commemorates the Signal Corps' first Medal of Honor winner. A barracks at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, is also named in honor of Morgan D. Lane.

Army's version of the Medal of Honor

For "gallantry in action and other soldierlike qualities..."