

# *Michael Huskey*

## **Medal of Honor Recipient**

Michael Huskey, a resident of Lockport, Niagara County, New York, was a sailor in the United States Navy during the Civil War. According to General Order #32, Huskey was awarded the Medal of Honor on 16 April 1864 for his conduct during the Steele's Bayou/Deer Creek Expedition of March 1863. His citation reads:

“Fireman aboard the *U.S.S. Carondelet*, Deer Creek Expedition, March 1863. Carrying out his duties gallantly, Huskey volunteered to aid in the rescue of the tug *Ivy* under the fire of the enemy, and set forth general meritorious conduct during this hazardous mission.”

Michael Huskey enlisted for three years in the United States Navy on 22 January 1862 at Cairo, Illinois. He served aboard the *USS Carondelet* as a 1<sup>st</sup> Class Fireman until his death in Memphis, Tennessee on or about 22 October 1864. Information abstracted from the muster roll of the *USS Carondelet* described him as 5' 7" ruddy complexion, with gray eyes and brown hair and that he was “Sent to a US Hospital [in] Memphis” sometime before 1 October 1864.



Due to its location on the Mississippi River, Memphis became a convenient place to care for sick and wounded soldiers from the surrounding area. Dr. Ninian Pinckney, Fleet Surgeon of the Mississippi Squadron, had acquired the use of the Commerce Hotel, turning it into a hospital with hospital barges moored outside on the river to accommodate the overflow of sick and wounded. It was here that Mr. Huskey died. He was interred in Memphis, presumably in the Memphis National Cemetery as one of the “Unknown” burials. A cemetery began after Union forces gained control of the city. Thirty-two acres of land were purchased north of the city for use as a burying ground. Originally called the Mississippi River National Cemetery, bodies from camps and hospitals in the region were re-interred there, accounting for the 8,000 unknown burials.

In December of 1864, Niagara County surrogate records show Julia Heuskey (sic) petitioning Niagara County for her son, Michael's goods, chattels, and credits. It states that “Michael Heuskey of the Town of Lockport in the said County of Niagara died on board the *USS Naval Hospital Pinckney* on or about

the 28<sup>th</sup> day of October in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-four. That at the time of his death he was an inhabitant of the County of Niagara.”

The surrogate record further states that he “left no widow child or children him surviving, he never having been married. He left one brother, Roger S., aged about thirty years, whose residence is now unknown, but supposed to be in California. He left also another brother, William of about seventeen years of age, residence with your petitioner and has no general guardian appointed by the Surrogate to your petitioner’s knowledge.” The paperwork was then signed by Julia with an “X” as her signature.

In a *New York Times* article “Medals Awaiting Owners” dated 7 February 1898, Michael Huskey is one of the sailors listed whose medal had not yet been claimed. Obviously due to his death in Memphis, Mr. Huskey was unable to claim his Medal of Honor. By the time the article was written both of his parents had also died. It appears that the medal remains unclaimed to this day. We are not sure the family even realized that he had received the MOH.

## Huskey Family

Further research of the Huskey family in Niagara County reveals a successful, though semi-literate farming family with origins in Ireland. The 1855 Lockport census shows that the family had lived in Niagara County for six years and were all born in Ireland. Their arrival date corresponds with the dates of the Irish Potato Famine (1845-1852) when a million Irish emigrated to escape the blight. While it has been stated by various sources that Michael Huskey was born in either New York City, or Niagara County, evidence from the census and other sources indicate that he was born in Ireland and emigrated as a lad of around seven years of age. In 1921, Michael Huskey’s younger brother William and his wife took a trip to Cuba. As part of the passport application process, William had to fill out a *Form For Naturalized Citizen*. In it he states that he was born in County Limerick, Ireland, emigrated in 1848, and had lived in Lockport, New York ever since.



An old photograph of the Huskey Homestead in the town of Royalton located on Chestnut Ridge Road circa 1960. This was the farm they moved to right across the Lockport Line and farmed by Michael Sr. and William Huskey.

## Huskey family beyond the Civil War

On April 9, 1870, the Huskey family (Michael Sr., Julia and any children under 16) became naturalized citizens. The petition was signed by Michael Sr. with an “X” as his mark. We do not know if their son Michael was ever naturalized. His parents lived in Lockport until 1871, (6207 Old Niagara Road) when they moved to a farm on Chestnut Ridge in the Town of Royalton. Michael, the father passed away in February 1890, leaving his wife, Julia, and one son, William, surviving him. Julia died in November 1893 and buried next to her husband in St. Patrick’s Cemetery, Lockport (section 4, lot 95). Their son, William, died 8 August 1933. He left a handicapped son, Roger, and two daughters, Irene Dodge and Julia Turner, as survivors. Roger passed away February 1951 never having been married or producing children. Julia died February 1947, also without heirs. When Irene died, 20 February 1965, she left no survivors, effectively ending the Huskey line of our Medal of Honor recipient, Michael.

## Steele’s Bayou/Deer Creek Expedition

The Steele’s Bayou Expedition was an attempt by Admiral Porter to circle Vicksburg from the north in March 1863. If the mission was successful, General Grant would have access to the high, dry lands behind the city from which to bombard the city. Acting on information gleaned from runaway slaves, Porter planned a reconnaissance mission thirty miles through Steele’s Bayou. The mission began on 14 March 1863 with General Grant accompanying the Admiral to coordinate Army efforts. The path through the bayou was little more than a flooded ditch through a forest of cypress trees. To ensure enough clearance, the ironclads would ram trees down enlarging the floating surface.

On 16 March, the flotilla entered Black Bayou. Here, thick trees on either bank arched over the water forming a green tunnel under which the ships passed. Residents along the route fled as the smoking ironclads chugged their way through the dark water. Foraging parties brought back food and other supplies. However, the fleeing homeowners alerted the Confederate forces who in turn lit cotton bales aflame on the banks of the bayou. The heat and the smoke were formidable.



A picture of Deer Creek across from the Indian Mounds looking north taken in March 2002. The modern system of levees and flood controls has lowered the water levels in the bayous since the Civil War, but the narrow tree-lined banks and the constricted water ways are still very much in evidence.

According to a letter from General William T. Sherman back to Headquarters on 21 March, “Deer Creek is a narrow, sluggish stream, full of willow bushes and overhanging trees, through which nothing but keel boats have usually plied. His [Porter’s] ironclads move like snails, but with great power, forcing all

saplings and bushes and drift aside, but the channel is useless to us in a military way.” He continues, “My own impression is that the enemy have so obstructed Rolling Fork Bayou that it will be absolutely impassable to the admiral’s fleet, and it will be a difficult and dangerous task to withdraw it safely back to Steele’s Bayou and deep, navigable water.”

Admiral David Dixon Porter writes in his memoir, “The flotilla moved on about a mile, and, on turning a bend, ran almost into a fort in the middle of the river, with the channel being blocked by sunken steamers. Heavy rifled guns were mounted in the works, and there was a large body of troops in the fort who jumped to their pieces the moment our vessels appeared in sight.”

Seven miles from clear sailing at Rolling Fork, reports were received that the rebels were chopping down large trees to fall across the waterway, impeding traffic. In the morning, the flotilla came upon a grass covered section of water. The first ship ventured into this mess immediately getting stuck. The *Carondelet* attempted the same feat, only to get stuck fast in what turned out to be willow switches. Rebel troops advanced on the position and it was soon reported that they were now cutting trees across the water behind the flotilla, effectively trapping the vessels. Admiral Porter, recognizing the predicament they were in, prepared orders to scuttle the flotilla rather than let it fall into Confederate hands. At the same time, Porter backed the ships back down the bayou.

Photo # NH 63376 USS Carondelet (1862-1865)



U. S. GUNBOAT CARONDELET

Photographed published in Rear Admiral Henry Walke's "Naval Scenes and Reminiscences of the Civil War in the United States ..." (1877). The five-pointed star suspended between the ship's smokestacks is of interest. Note the crew on the decks. One of them could be Michael Huskey: if so, it is his only known picture.

It was at this time that Rebel troops and sharpshooters began their assault on the retreating flotilla. The ships were under heavy fire until General Sherman’s troops arrived to drive the Confederate forces back. This was the occasion that Michael Huskey proved his gallantry in battle, for which he later won the Medal of Honor. While the expedition failed in its attempt to circle above Vicksburg, it was successful because large amounts of cattle and provisions needed by the enemy were captured or destroyed.

## ***U.S.S. Carondelet***

The *USS Carondelet* saw more action than any other ship in the US Navy until World War II. The gunboat was launched 12 October 1861 and commissioned on 10 January 1862, becoming the first ironclad: predating both the *USS Monitor* and the *CSS Virginia* (Merrimac). It saw its first action as it bombarded Fort Henry on February 6<sup>th</sup>. Six days later, the *Carondelet* shelled Fort Donelson for the following three days. During the shelling, the ironclad was struck accidentally by the *Pittsburg* and returned to Cairo on February 16<sup>th</sup> for repairs. A month later, she was back in action attacking Island No. 10 from March 15<sup>th</sup> until April 5<sup>th</sup>. On that last day, *Carondelet* was the first vessel to run past the island and engage shore batteries south of the island. The ironclad was very active on the Mississippi, engaging in numerous battles. Some of those battles during Michael Huskey's service were:

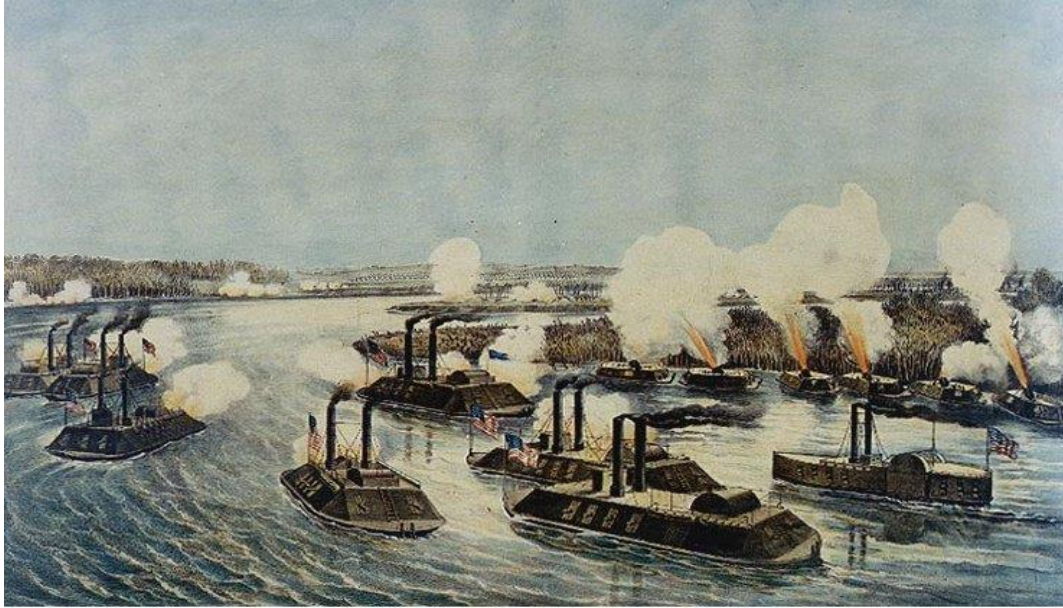
13 April 1862	Fort Pillow
10 May 1862	Battle of Plum Point Bend
6 June 1862	Battle of Memphis
17 June 1862	White River Expedition
15 July 1862	Engaged <i>C.S.S. Arkansas</i> at Vicksburg. Run aground
Aug. - Oct 1862	Refitted at Cairo
16 November 1862	White River operations
11 January 1863	Defense of Fort Pillow
14-26 March 1863	Steele's Bayou Expedition
16 April 1863	Vicksburg bombardment
29 April 1863	Grand Gulf, Mississippi bombardment
18-22 May 1863	Vicksburg bombardment
31 May 1863	Rescue of Union troops at Perkins Landing
18 November 1863	Hog Point, Louisiana
Mar. - May 1864	Red River Expedition

The *Carondelet* went on to serve honorably during the rest of the Civil War. By the end of the war, the ship had the distinction of fighting in more engagements than any navy ship until World War II. She was decommissioned 20 June 1865 and fit as an ordinance ship at Mound City, Illinois. Later, the ship was sold and stripped. By 1870, she was serving as a wharf boat at Gallipolis, Ohio. Just before she was to be demolished in 1873, a flood washed the hulk away to Manchester Island in Ohio where it sank. Her ultimate fate was unknown until a search operation by the National Underwater & Marine Agency pinpointed the location of the wreckage in May 1982. Two days previous a dredge had passed directly over the wreckage demolishing most of the sunken vessel.

## **The Tug *Ivy***

The *Ivy* was a screw tug, built in St. Louis in 1862. The Navy assigned the tug to the Mississippi Squadron, taking part in the Vicksburg operations of 1862-1863. She served as Admiral David Dixon Porter's flagship in January 1863 as his fleet attacked Fort Hindman. During the Vicksburg campaign, until the city's fall in July 1863, the *Ivy* often served as Porter's flagship. After the fall of Vicksburg, the tug served as a dispatch boat and also received prisoners of war.





**Bombardment and Capture of Island Number Ten on the Mississippi River, April 7, 1862**

Colored lithograph published by Currier & Ives, New York, circa 1862.

It depicts the bombardment of the Confederate fortifications on Island Number Ten by Federal gunboats and mortar boats. Ships seen include (from left to right): *Mound City*, *Louisville*, *Pittsburg*, *Carondelet*, Flagship *Benton*, *Cincinnati*, *Saint Louis*, and *Conestoga*.

Mortar boats are firing from along the river bank.

## **How does this pertain to Niagara County?**

As the medals have not been claimed, Niagara County would like to claim them on Mr. Huskey's behalf and have them on permanent display at the Niagara County Courthouse. It would be a tremendous example of Niagara County honoring a true American hero

---Compiled by Craig E. Bacon and Kate Emerson of the Niagara County Historians Office