

## 1st Michigan Colored Infantry Civil War Soldiers Remembered

On Wednesday, April 17, 2013, soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Colored Infantry buried in Beaufort National Cemetery in Beaufort, South Carolina were remembered and honored. A laurel wreath, adorned with a white banner labeled MICHIGAN and a red, white and blue ribbon, was placed where the Michigan soldiers, buried largely together, rest in Section 31.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Colored Infantry was formed on February 23, 1863 with approximately 845 men from southern Michigan and Ontario, Canada. The unit was re-designated the 102<sup>nd</sup> Regiment U.S. Colored Troops where it fought throughout South Carolina, Georgia and Florida where they lost six soldiers in action, five dying of wounds and approximately one hundred and thirty perished of disease. The unit was mustered out of service on September 30, 1865 and disbanded less than a month later in Detroit on October 17.

Commissioner Jack Dempsey and his wife Suzanne arranged for this impromptu tribute to these Michigan soldier while in the Hilton Head region. With a few other Michiganders, Bill and Carol Bedford of Crystal Lake and David and Gail Sonnenschein of Bloomfield Hills, vacationing in the area, a fitting ceremony was held. Excerpts from an e-mail Jack sent back to Michigan, he described the ceremony as follows:

Weather was perfect: high 70s, mostly sunny, little wind. We arrived with the wreath all prepared around 2:30 pm; at first we had some difficulty relocating the section of Michigan soldiers that I found last year, whose stones are engraved only with name, occasionally rank, grave number, and "USCT" without any other designation. With the aid of others in the Michigan cohort, after a few moments we did pinpoint the Michigan soldiers.

After taking a number of pictures all 7 of us (6 from Michigan plus a cemetery official) gathered around the wreath as the dappled sunlight shone down on the memorial and the nearby headstones, while I spoke a few sentences about the context of the service of these men, then reading aloud Dudley Randall's poem *Memorial Wreath*. It was very moving. Then, as we stood around chatting for a few moments, all of sudden came the sound of a military jet aloft above the cemetery, and a fighter flew overhead on its departure from Parris Island - as if performing an honorary flyover. Overhead, far above the jet, the sliver of the moon appeared in the sky. It was the perfect and fitting conclusion to the time we had together, humbled to be in the presence of the graves of these Michigan heroes.

The wreath will stay in the cemetery for as long as it looks decent and respectable. Thanks to Jack, Suzanne and the other Michiganders, some of Michigan's own, at a great distance from home, were honored and remembered on this day.

*Photos on next page*



*Jack and Suzzanne Dempsey (center) with other Michiganders in the Beaufort National Cemetery in South Carolina after laying a wreath in the memory of the 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Colored soldiers buried there.*