



The Loss of a Giant in the Collecting Community

In a 1988 *MI* interview, Mike McAfee was asked to share any words of wisdom he'd like to pass on to photo collectors.

"Speaking as a curator," Mike began, referencing his job at West Point, "I'd like to remind everyone that by collecting these things, we are taking on a responsibility to see that they are preserved and protected. Keep your CDV's in archival sleeves, for instance. They're not bubble gum cards. Try to respect them individually as little bits of history (not merchandise or commodities) that we are holding in trust for future generations."

After learning of Mike's death, which occurred on August 3, I recalled this interview and reread it. His words reminded me that he was one of the earliest collectors of the "Centennial Generation" to understand the importance of Civil War portrait photography.

Another of Mike's notable quotes about collecting was repeated to me by his good friend, Thomas Harris: "The true collector wants prices to go down, not up."

For the better part of a half-century, Mike had an enormous impact on Civil War photography and collecting. He became a leading authority on uniforms, as evidenced by his many books on the subject and his long-running column in this magazine, *Uniforms & History*.

During the past five years with *MI*, I've lost count of the number of times individuals have contacted me, seeking out Mike with a question about an image, or to get permission to publish images from the superb collection he built over a lifetime.

Mike was intensely private, and a true gentleman. He was also a man who dispensed knowledge with the confidence of one who has a deep appreciation of the subject.

After Mike was diagnosed with a malignancy last summer, *Uniforms & History* went on hiatus. He planned to resume it once his good health returned. Within the last few months, we traded emails about scanners and he fielded a few image questions. In April, he wrote a wonderful tribute to another pioneer, Henry Deeks, with whom he enjoyed a great friendship.

In early August, I received a call from Harris with the news that Mike had lost his battle. I take solace in thinking that Mike and Henry are now swapping stories about the photos that passed through their hands over the years, or recalling the fun times they had at the Lincoln Diner in Gettysburg.

In Mike's honor, *Uniforms & History* will cease publication. It was his column.

Mike's legacy will live on in archived columns, his books, and all the advice and words of wisdom he shared through the years for the betterment of the collecting community.

His passing coincides with two other community announcements that I had planned to highlight in this note: The debut of a new column, *Fakes, Forgeries and Frauds* by Perry Frohne, and the establishment of the Civil War Photo Collector's Society, a partnership with Doug York of the Facebook group Civil War Faces. Information about both can be found elsewhere in this issue.



Thomas Harris.

Mike McAfee, July 2010.

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