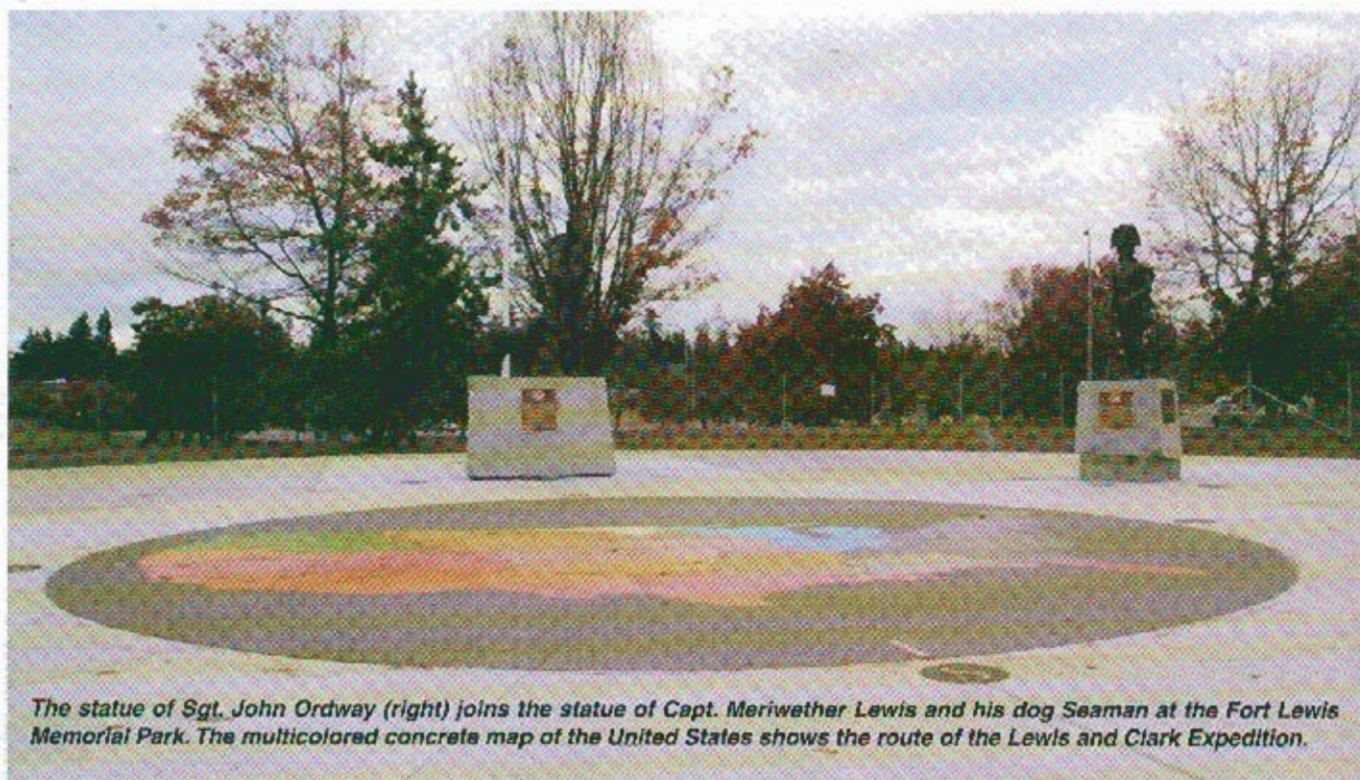


In Tribute to John Ordway— The Indispensable First Sergeant

By Lt. Col. Thomas D. Morgan
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Sgt. John Ordway—or at least an impressive, larger-than-life-size facsimile—has returned to his destination of discovery. On a bright, sunny Pacific Northwest afternoon in September 2006, 200 years to the day that the Lewis and Clark Expedition returned to St. Louis from its epic journey to the Pacific Ocean, a bronze sculpture of Ordway was dedicated at the Fort Lewis, Wash., Memorial Park.

It was a far cry from the cold, rainy weather encountered by Lewis and Clark at the mouth of the Columbia River in Fort Clatsop, where they spent the winter of 1805-06 while waiting for spring and the opportunity to return home. The expedition had been long and arduous, encompassing more than 8,000 miles of walking, horseback riding, canoe and boat paddling up the mighty Missouri River and its tributaries, across the Rocky Mountains and down the Columbia



The statue of Sgt. John Ordway (right) joins the statue of Capt. Meriwether Lewis and his dog Seaman at the Fort Lewis Memorial Park. The multicolored concrete map of the United States shows the route of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

River to the Pacific Ocean. Thirty-three people (28 soldiers, two civilian contractors, a slave and an Indian woman and her infant son) made up the permanent party of the Corps of Discovery, as the expedition was called. And despite wild animals, poisonous snakes, hostile Indians, treacherous rivers, quicksand, extreme weather conditions, the threat of starvation, and a variety of illnesses, plus extreme fatigue and discomfort on a journey that lasted from May 22, 1804, to September 23, 1806, only one person died, Sgt. Charles Floyd, and he died of natural causes.

Contrary to myth and movies that have portrayed members of the Corps of Discovery as mountain men who wore buckskin and coonskin hats, the success of the small expedition was the result of its basic military character provided by the chain-of-command leadership of its two officers, Captains Lewis and Clark, and an indispensable soldier, Orderly Sgt.—1st Sgt., we would call him today—Ordway. Most of the other expedition members were recruited and enlisted into the Army expressly for the mission of discovery.

The Ordway sculpture is believed to be the first of its kind on a U.S. military installation of a specifically named enlisted soldier. In commemorating the enlisted men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition (and first sergeants and non-commissioned officers in general, the backbone of the

Army), the statue joins that of Capt. Meriwether Lewis, for whom Fort Lewis is named, and his Newfoundland dog Seaman, who accompanied his master on the expedition. The sculpture of Capt. Lewis was dedicated in 2005. The memorial park also includes several commemorative bronze plaques set into granite boulders that are the bases for the Lewis and Ordway statues, a roster plaque and an embedded, multicolored concrete map of the United States showing the route of the expedition.

"History remembers generals and other great captains," CSM Jimmie Spencer, U.S. Army retired, director of NCO and Soldier Programs for the Association of the United States Army, noted. "But rarely is recognition given to enlisted soldiers and noncommissioned officers by name for their service to the nation."

Indeed, perhaps no one was more important to the success of the expedition than Sgt. Ordway, the only Regular Army sergeant who volunteered for the expedition. Among the young, rambunctious Kentucky and Virginia woodsmen recruited for the expedition, Ordway stood out because he was from the Northeast and was well educated. As orderly sergeant, he was one of the three squad leaders of the troops, and while he carried out the clerical duties that came with his position, he was hardly an ordinary clerk. He supervised and trained the enlisted men, enforced discipline, issued supplies and acted as commander of the expedition in the absence of Lewis and Clark. He had no mutinies, desertions or other acts of misconduct that have marred so many similar explorations.

Initially, Ordway had to build teamwork within the Corps of Discovery. There were violations of conduct from the free-spirited, restless young men who had signed on,

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primarily for adventure. Some of them refused to obey orders, stole, got drunk on whiskey rations and were generally rebellious. Gradually, Ordway enforced proper discipline and won the confidence of the men who were selected as the permanent party of the expedition.

Ordway also kept a daily journal, the only person to do so for the entire 855-day expedition. The 100,000 word text describes both the good and bad times and offers insightful observations about the Indians encountered during the journey; his description of Indian culture is still valuable history. The journal was purchased by Lewis and Clark after the expedition; they'd planned to incorporate it into their book. However, the journal was "lost" after Lewis' death in 1809 and wasn't found until the early 1900s. Published in 1913 and notable for its detail—Ordway named the hunters, salt makers and scouts at the various places along the journey—it emphasized the human element of the adventure and described the Indians better than earlier versions of the Lewis and Clark journals that had been extensively edited.

That Lewis and Clark held Ordway in high esteem is evident from their own journals. But despite Sgt. Ordway's significance to the expedition and the praise he deserves, he is practically lost to history. Other than his journal and the little historical documentation that still exists, not a great deal is known about the man. Much of what has been attributed to him—primarily by expedition reenactors—remains speculation. We do know that he was born in 1775. He was one of 10 children born to John Ordway Sr. and Hannah Morse near Dunbarton, N.H. He probably joined the local militia in the late 1790s, during a quasi-war with France, and he farmed. Around 1800, he headed west and joined the Regular Army. In late 1803, Capt. Lewis recruited him for the Corps of Discovery from Capt. Bissell's company of the First Regiment of Infantry at Fort Kaskaskia (in present day Illinois) in Indian territory.

Ordway received a salary of \$266.66 and a 320-acre land grant for his services during the expedition. He was discharged from the Army after accompanying a party of Mandan and Osage Indians to Washington, D.C., to meet President Jefferson. He married and became a prosperous plantation owner in southeastern Missouri near New Madrid. His first wife died, and he remarried, fathering a

son and daughter. He died in 1817 of unknown causes, still in his early 40s.

The Lewis and Clark Expedition accomplished its mission of exploring and mapping the newly acquired Louisiana Territory and the Pacific Northwest because it was a well-led, trained and disciplined military unit. It ushered in the beginning of an era when the U.S. Army explored and pacified the West. Sgt. Ordway's legacy typifies the dedication and loyalty of the Army's noncommis-

sioned officers who have led, encouraged and sustained their soldiers for more than 200 years. Ordway was a smart, courageous soldier who set the example for his troops. He was one of those uniquely qualified early American leaders whose progressive attitudes distinguished him from his European counterparts. His mission of discovery became a vanguard of empire. He helped forge the legacy of the American Army's noncommissioned officers.

Dr. John Jewell sculpted the statue of Ordway. A source of inspiration for the figure was a Lewis and Clark reenactor named Peter Geery, who often portrayed Sgt. Ordway. Unfortunately, Geery died before the statue was completed. Alan Archambault, the Fort Lewis Military Museum curator and an expert on historic uniforms and accoutrements, ensured the accuracy of the details of the statue. Maj. Gen. John Hemphill, U.S. Army retired, proposed the commissioning of the statues of both Lewis and Ordway.

Fund-raising activities for the project were done under the auspices of AUSA. Contributions were received

from individuals, local businesses, AUSA corporate members and various associations, including AUSA and the Sergeants Major Association.

The Ordway dedication completes Phase II of the Fort Lewis Memorial Park Project. Phase III will see the completion of the park infrastructure, including a tutorial plaque to explain the salient points of the journey as well as benches, lighting and further landscaping. The final phase will be the construction of a low wall that will encircle the main part of the park. The memorial park will be available for units that have served at Fort Lewis to commemorate that service with memorial plaques and unit crests.

In the words of I Corps CSM Tommy Williams, who presided over the Ordway statue dedication ceremony, "Teamwork remains fundamental to success. He typified the American spirit and selfless soldiers."



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