



Private Philip G. Shadrach



Private George D. Wilson

# Medal of Honor: U.S. Civil War

Secretary of War Edwin Stanton presented the first Medal of Honor on 25 March 1863 to the surviving members of Andrews' Raiders whose mission was to sabotage a rail supply line in 1862.<sup>1</sup> More than 160 years later, the final two soldiers, Pvt. Philip G. Shadrach and Pvt. George D. Wilson, were recognized by President Joe Biden and posthumously presented the medal.

During the 3 July 2024 White House ceremony attended by the soldiers' descendants, the president remarked, "The very first recipients of the Medal of Honor were a small band known as Andrews' Raiders, ... who led one of the most daring operations in the entire Civil War. Two soldiers ... died because of that operation but never received this recognition. Today, we right that wrong. Today, they finally receive the recognition they deserve."<sup>2</sup>

Shadrach and Wilson, originally members of the 2nd Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment, joined civilian spy James Andrews, twenty-two soldiers, and two additional civilians in stealing a locomotive deep within Confederate territory on 12 April 1862 and steering it north toward Chattanooga,

Tennessee, creating as much damage as possible to the rail-ways and telegraph lines along the way.<sup>3</sup> This would become known as the Great Locomotive Chase. The stolen train's conductor, William Fuller, gathered a party and took chase on foot before using several other locomotives to eventually catch up.<sup>4</sup> The seven-hour pursuit would end just eighteen miles short of Chattanooga with the group evading capture for over two weeks. Though all were eventually caught, most escaped. Eight were tried and hanged in Atlanta by the Confederates, including Andrews, Shadrach, and Wilson.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the years, the soldiers who participated in the train hijacking received the Medal of Honor, with Pvt. Jacob Parrott being its very first recipient; however, neither Shadrach nor Wilson were recommended until recently. During the Hall of Heroes induction 4 July 2024 at the Pentagon, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III said, "Their medals are new, yet their bravery is eternal. ... Their story doesn't just inspire us, it challenges us. So we are not just here to honor their sacrifice, we are here to live up to their example."<sup>6</sup> ■

## Notes

1. "A History of Heroism," Congressional Medal of Honor Society, accessed 21 August 2024, <https://www.cmohs.org/medal/timeline>.

2. C. Todd Lopez, "Two Civil War Soldiers Receive Medal of Honor, Inducted into Hall of Heroes," U.S. Department of Defense News, 4 July 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3827750/two-civil-war-soldiers-receive-medal-of-honor-inducted-into-hall-of-heroes/#pop8266970>.

3. Josh Boak, "Biden Bestows Medal of Honor on Union Soldiers Who Helped Hijack Train in Confederate Territory,"

Associated Press, 3 July 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/medal-honor-biden-civil-war-locomotive-f951c46a9efe66be-4869fa3a78fef34d#>.

4. Alex Horton, "Civil War Soldiers in Wild Train Hijacking Receive Medal of Honor," *Washington Post*, 3 July 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2024/07/03/biden-civil-war-medal-of-honor/>.

5. Ibid.

6. Lopez, "Two Civil War Soldiers Receive Medal of Honor."