

## MY FRIEND CHARLIE SCHWARZ

By Paul Windels III

My friend Charlie Schwarz passed away last September. He was 87 years old, he had a wonderful family that he was completely in love with, his mind was clear, and he was still running around New York City until age finally caught up with him. Life did not cheat him, that is for sure, but it has left all of us who knew him pained at the thought of his empty chair as our lives go on.

Charlie's knowledge about the Civil War matched anybody's and covered a unique array of interests. Whether it was an aspect of Abraham Lincoln's character, a tactical move on a battlefield, an example of military leadership (or its lack), a political question, medical technology, the abolition of slavery, or just life on the home front, Charlie could hold his own in any conversation, and he was always eager to expand what he knew. He had such a keen interest in General Grant that he would never miss a "Grant" event, most recently the dinners held by the Grant Monument Association and always the commemorations of Grant's birth at Grant's Tomb, even in the pouring rain. It was very strange for me to attend those ceremonies this year without him.

When we formed the Civil War Forum of Metropolitan New York, Charlie played a central role, even when he was in the hospital recovering from heart surgery. Having been a Sergeant in the Army, he knew how to keep the show on the road and he would do whatever it took to keep things moving, such as scouting out restaurants and hotels as possible venues for our meetings and negotiating terms or lining up members for our next battlefield tour and making sure they paid on time, always with a smile or a joke or a story from his inexhaustible memory of movies, politics, and sports. But he never sought anything for himself. His cheerfulness and innate kindness matched his energy; on battlefield tours, his row at the back of the bus was the center of life; in short, he was the spirit of the Forum.

I spoke with him at least once a week during my three years as President of the Forum. He helped me work through crises like finding a new meeting venue on two weeks' notice, we made plans, we discussed who could fill different positions within the Forum. His judgment was superb, and he always had his eye on what we had to do next, but what I remember the most is that I never had a conversation with him -- whether in good times or in difficult ones -- that did not end on a happy note.

All of our members adored Charlie. We decided to honor him by creating an award in his name: the Sergeant Charlie Award for service above and beyond the call of duty. Of course we gave him the first award. At his wake, the Award stood right next to his coffin.