

A CIVIL WAR SOLDIER'S MARK AT ARLINGTON HOUSE

By

George Dodge*

On May 24, 1861, Union forces crossed the Long Bridge into Virginia and occupied Arlington Heights and the city of Alexandria. The advance met no resistance as Union soldiers marched through the forests of oak and elm of Arlington Heights. After climbing the rolling hills of the estate of Mary Custis Lee and Robert E. Lee, a Union regiment, the Eighth New York Militia, bivouacked at Arlington House.¹

Arlington House was well known to Union soldiers as the home of General Robert E. Lee, Commanding General of all Confederate forces in the eastern theater of the Civil War after June 1, 1862. Since Lee had refused an offer to command the Union army, and resigned his commission with the U.S Army and had become, instead, a general in the Confederate Army he was considered, by many, a traitor. Nevertheless, Union Generals Irvin McDowell and Charles W. Sandford, in an effort to protect the Lees' property, stationed officers inside Arlington House. In addition, guards were positioned outside the mansion.² In spite of that security, a Union soldier by the name of John Chapman managed to enter Arlington House and ascend two stairwells to the attic. In the Arlington House attic, John Chapman left his mark for future generations.

John Chapman's Early Life

John Chapman was apparently born in Belfast, Ireland in 1845. He arrived in Philadelphia from Liverpool, England, on June 18, 1852, nearing the age of seven. He had accompanied his twenty-eight year-old mother, Henrietta Chapman, on the ship "City of Glasgow." Their possessions consisted of three pieces of luggage.³ During his youth, Chapman lived in Philadelphia and was employed as a weaver.⁴

On Saturday, July 20, 1861, one day prior to the Battle of First Bull Run or First Manassas, Chapman enlisted in Company K of the 28th Regiment of the Pennsylvania Volunteers. Chapman's enlistment was for three years at \$13 per month. According to that regiment's 1861 descriptive roster, Chapman had grey eyes, light hair, light complexion, was five feet seven inches tall and allegedly was twenty-one years old.⁵ Actually, Chapman was only sixteen. It appears that he convinced the recruiting officer in Philadelphia's Ward Six that he was twenty-one years old, the minimum age for enlistment without written consent of a parent or guardian. Enlistment of those between eighteen and twenty-one required parental consent. Chapman's mother probably did not consent to her sixteen-year old son's enlist-

ment. However, even if she had consented Chapman was under the minimum age of eighteen. Accordingly, Chapman misrepresented his age as twenty-one in order to enter the army. Chapman's actual age was detected by army hospital personnel in 1864. Medical records from army hospitals in Chattanooga and Philadelphia, note Chapman's age as nineteen in 1864.⁶ He was among the youngest of the Union troops to shoulder a rifle. Less than two percent of all Union volunteers were under eighteen years of age at the time of their enlistment.⁷

No sooner had Chapman been mustered into service when his regiment was ordered south. Union regiments were rushed south due to the panic in Washington following the Union debacle at the Battle of Bull Run. The 28th Pennsylvania Volunteers boarded a train in Philadelphia and arrived in Baltimore in late July 1861. The regiment, equipped with British Enfield rifles with sword bayonets, proceeded from Baltimore to Sandy Hook, Maryland, near Harper's Ferry. For the next twelve months Chapman's regiment performed chiefly reconnaissance duty in Maryland and northern Virginia.⁸ Meanwhile, the Union Army of the Potomac advanced toward Richmond, Virginia, was defeated and returned to northern Virginia.

Action of the 28th Pennsylvania Volunteers

The 28th Pennsylvania Volunteers arrived at Manassas, Virginia during the waning hours of the battle of Second Bull Run (Second Manassas), on August 30, 1862. After fourteen months of virtually no action in the field, Chapman's regiment had again missed a major battle. However, Confederate forces were preparing to mount an offensive into Maryland. Chapman and the 28th Pennsylvania Volunteers would soon receive their baptism of fire.⁹

On September 16, 1862, Chapman was among 87,000 Union troops in the Army of the Potomac that pursued Robert E. Lee's Confederate army into Maryland. Lee's 40,000 soldiers made a stand between the Potomac River and Antietam Creek. That night, Chapman and 800 other soldiers in his regiment encamped outside of Sharpsburg, Maryland, near the Hoffman house, where they anxiously awaited their first battle. Chapman's Pennsylvania regiment was part of a brigade which consisted of three other regiments: the 5th, 7th, and 66th Ohio Infantry.¹⁰

At approximately 5:45 A.M., daybreak, on Wednesday, September 17, 1862, the Union assault on Confederate positions began. Between 8:30 and 8:40 A.M. the 28th Pennsylvania Volunteers and the three Ohio regiments advanced into the East Woods and were deployed in a line facing west towards the Hagerstown Pike. When the advance reached the edge of the woods the Ohio soldiers delivered a volley into the flank of the Georgia 6th Infantry. The Georgians were facing north along a fence marking the northern

boundary of D. R. Miller's thirty acre cornfield, known forever after the battle as the Cornfield. After the Ohio volley, Chapman's 28th Pennsylvania Regiment delivered its first volley of the war toward the enemy and charged into the Cornfield. After brief hand-to-hand combat the 6th Georgia was virtually wiped out, sustaining 226 casualties out of 250 soldiers engaged in the Cornfield. The Ohio regiments and Chapman's Pennsylvania regiment proceeded along the Smoketown Road to the Mumma farm where the Ohio regiments took position on a plateau less than 200 yards directly in front of the Dunker Church, the most widely known landmark on the battlefield. The 28th Pennsylvania Regiment advanced across the Hagerstown Pike, between 9:00 and 9:45 A.M., engaging the 7th South Carolina near the Dunker Church. Perhaps Chapman observed wounded Confederate soldiers seeking refuge in that church of the German Baptist Brethren, a pacifist sect which had constructed the Dunker Church in 1855. Shortly after forcing the 7th South Carolina to retreat, the 28th Pennsylvania assisted in repulsing a counter-attack by the 30th Virginia Infantry.¹¹ Among the fighting between the East Woods and the Dunker Church, John Chapman was wounded.

According to regimental hospital records, Chapman received a flesh wound with a bullet (Minie ball) passing through his thigh.¹² Regimental surgeons of the 28th Pennsylvania were faced with 266 casualties, nearly one-third of the regiment.¹³ Undoubtedly, Chapman's flesh wound was a low priority. Chapman was transported to Washington, D.C. and admitted to Judiciary Square Hospital on September 22, 1862, five days after the Battle of Antietam.¹⁴

Chapman was one of 9,416 Union soldiers wounded at Antietam. Total Union casualties at the battle were 12,469. Confederate casualties were approximately 10,292. The combined casualties of 22,761 made Antietam the most bloody single-day battle of the war.¹⁵ Chapman was more fortunate than most of his wounded Union comrades as he recovered quickly from his wound and received a thirty-day furlough on October 27, 1862.¹⁶

Chapman Visits Arlington House

It appears that Chapman visited Arlington House during his thirty-day furlough, between October 27th and November 26, 1862. He managed to pass Union guards and enter the mansion. It is likely that he paused to discuss with sentinels the details of his wound and battle experience from Antietam. Once inside Arlington House Chapman climbed two stairwells. As he walked up the thirteen steps of the second stairwell to the landing below the attic, perhaps he felt the pain of his recent leg wound — a wound inflicted by Robert E. Lee's troops. After walking an additional seven steps from that landing Chapman was in Mary and Robert E. Lee's attic.

The attic of Arlington House contained possessions which Mrs. Lee was forced to leave behind when she fled from the mansion on May 15, 1861.¹⁷ Chapman, armed with a pencil, stood on a chest or some other object to expand his reach above the inside of the attic door. At a point slightly over eight feet from the floor, Chapman printed the following on a vertical wooden board above the attic door:

John Chapman
Co. K 28 Regt. PV
1862

The abbreviations are for Company K of the 28th Regiment of the Pennsylvania Volunteers, also known as the "Goldstream Regiment."¹⁸

Shortly after Chapman's excursion to Arlington House he returned to his regiment. According to a letter from his company captain to Judiciary Square Hospital's Surgeon in Charge, Chapman had reported back to his regiment in December 1862.¹⁹ His regiment moved to Fredericksburg, Virginia, between December 10-14, 1862, but did not participate in the disastrous federal assault in the Battle of Fredericksburg on December 13. During the winter of 1862 to April 27, 1863, Chapman's regiment was stationed at Stafford Court House, Stafford County, Virginia, not far from the site of their next major battle — Chancellorsville.²⁰

On Friday, May 1, 1863, Chapman was among 70,000 Union soldiers of the Army of the Potomac that crossed the Rappahannock River in General Joseph Hooker's offensive against General Lee's Confederate army, the Army of Northern Virginia. The 28th Pennsylvania was deployed astride the Orange Plank Road, near the Alrich House when the Battle of Chancellorsville commenced.²¹ This was Chapman's second battle with his regiment. He was wounded again and listed as missing. On May 6, 1863, three days after the battle, Chapman was admitted to a field hospital at Aquia Creek, Virginia, with a "slight contusion."²² Perhaps he was hit by a spent bullet or was knocked to the ground by a Confederate shell near the Orange Plank Road on May 2, or near Fairview Cemetery where his regiment protected the center of the Union line during its retreat on May 3, 1863.²³ The injury was minor as Chapman returned to duty on May 16, 1863.²⁴

On June 5, 1863, Chapman and his regiment discarded their British Enfield rifles for new Springfield rifles, just in time for the Gettysburg campaign.²⁵ From June 11 to June 30, 1863, the Army of the Potomac pursued Lee's Confederate army toward Pennsylvania. The 28th Pennsylvania was deployed on Culp's Hill, near the town of Gettysburg, on July 1, 1863. The regiment constructed breastworks on Culp's Hill which shielded them from Confederate rifle fire. Accordingly, during the three-day Battle of Gettysburg, the 28th Pennsylvania sustained only twenty-five casualties.²⁶ Chapman emerged from the great Union victory at Gettysburg without injury, unlike



over 23,000 of his comrades in the Army of the Potomac.²⁷ Chapman probably did not realize that, at Gettysburg, he had participated in the turning point of the war.

Union Victories

In October 1863, the 28th Pennsylvania Volunteers were transferred from the east to the Army of the Cumberland in the western theater of the war. Chapman and his regiment reached Wauhatchie, Tennessee, on the morning of October 29, 1863, the day after the Battle of Wauhatchie. The 28th Pennsylvania was held in reserve at the small but significant battles in Tennessee at Lookout Mountain (November 24) and Missionary Ridge (November 25). However, on November 27, 1863, the regiment was in the front lines with seven killed and twenty-seven wounded at the Battle of Ringgold Gap, Tennessee.²⁸ These Union victories, under the leadership of General Ulysses S. Grant, helped open the road for a Union advance into Georgia.

While in Tennessee, Chapman and most of his regiment re-enlisted as veteran volunteers on December 27, 1863. Chapman was awarded a \$400 bounty with \$60 paid upon re-enlisting.²⁹ Chapman must have exhibited some leadership qualities since he was promoted to corporal on March 1, 1864, after spending the winter stationed along the Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad.³⁰ Three weeks later, on March 22, 1864, he was admitted to the regimental hospital with gonorrhoea. After nine days in the hospital, he was released to his regiment on March 30, 1864.³¹

In the spring of 1864, the Army of the Cumberland renewed its march on Atlanta and met Confederate forces in battle at Resaca, Georgia on May 15, 1864. In that battle Chapman received another flesh wound — a gun shot wound to his right leg. Five days after being wounded, on May 20, 1864, he was admitted to a Union hospital in Chattanooga. One week later he was transferred to Nashville General Hospital. He was granted a furlough on June 23, 1864, and was transported home to Philadelphia. While there he was admitted to the U.S. General Hospital on South Street on July 21, 1864.³² Perhaps his mother, Henrietta, or some home town friends visited him during his convalescence.

Chapman returned to Washington at Cliffburne Depot on September 29, 1864. However, the wound he received at the Battle of Resaca was serious enough to require a reassignment on October 5, 1864, from the 28th Pennsylvania Volunteers to Company G of the 10th Regiment of the Veteran Reserve Corps, nee Invalid Corps.³³ The Invalid Corps was established in April 1863, to consist of soldiers unfit for field service due to wounds or illness but capable of guard duty or other light duty. In March 1864, the Invalid Corps

was renamed Veteran Reserve Corps apparently due to effects upon morale based on the initials "IC" being used by government inspectors to mark condemned property, i.e., Inspected — Condemned."³⁴ Chapman's transfer to the Veteran Reserve Corps resulted in reduction of his rank from corporal to private. However, by December 1864, Chapman had again attained the rank of corporal.³⁵

For the remainder of the war, Chapman was stationed at the defenses of Washington, primarily at Camp Foy in Washington, D.C. During his eight and one-half months of guard duty, he was in the nation's capital to experience the celebration following news of Lee's surrender at Appomattox on April 9, 1865. He was also in Washington to receive the shocking news of Lincoln's assassination on April 15, 1865. Chapman was mustered out of the army on July 17, 1865, in Alexandria, Virginia not far from Arlington House.³⁶ His history after his discharge is unknown. It is very likely that he never married and that he died shortly after the war based on his wartime medical history and the fact that a federal pension was never issued under his name.³⁷ Chapman, his mother, a spouse and minor children were all eligible, under federal law, to apply for a pension based on his Union military service. No one applied. After 125 years, however, John Chapman's 1862 mark at Arlington House remains clear for all to witness.

Notes and References

*George Dodge is an Arlington attorney. He is chairman of the Civil War Heritage Committee of the Society.

We are grateful to Joseph Erwin for the accompanying photographs.

¹National Park Service, *Arlington House, the Robert E. Lee Memorial* (Washington, D.C.: Division of Publications, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1985), pp. 30-31.

²*Ibid.* See also, Eleanor Lee Templeman, *Arlington Heritage: Vignettes of a Virginia County*, (Arlington: The Author, 1959), p. 34.

³Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at Philadelphia January 2-Jauary 30, 1852. National Archives, Microfilm Box 74.

⁴Military Service Records of John Chapman, National Archives.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Medical Records of John Chapman, National Archives.

⁷Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), pp. 298-299.

⁸Frederick Henry Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, 3 vols. (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959), Vol. I, p. 1586.

See also, Samuel P. Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers 1861-65*, 5 vols. (Harrisburg, Pa.: B. Singerly, 1869), Vol. I, pp. 418-419. The 28th Pennsylvania Volunteers was raised by Colonel John W. Geary. The recruits were uniformed and equipped at his own expense, the uniforms being gray until replaced with Union blue.

⁹*Ibid.*

- ¹⁰Stephen W. Sears, *Landscape Turned Red, The Battle of Antietam* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1983), p. 224.
- ¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 232-233. See also, James V. Murfin, *The Gleam of Bayonets* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1965) pp. 212, 232, 234, 239, 243.
- ¹²Medical Records of John Chapman, National Archives.
- ¹³Bates, vol. I, p. 427.
- ¹⁴Medical Records of John Chapman, National Archives.
- ¹⁵Murfin, pp. 374-375, 377.
- ¹⁶Military Service Records of John Chapman, National Archives.
- ¹⁷Ruth Preston Rose, "Mrs. General Lee's Attempts to Regain Her Possessions After the Civil War," *Arlington Historical Magazine*, (October 1978), pp. 28-29.
- ¹⁸Dyer, vol. I, p. 1586. -
- ¹⁹Medical Records of John Chapman, National Archives.
- ²⁰Dyer, vol. I, p. 1586.
- ²¹Joseph P. Cullen, "The Battle of Chancellorsville," *Civil War Times Illustrated*, Volume VII, Number 2 (May 1968), pp. 14-15, 19-23. See also Bates, vol. I, p. 429.
- ²²Medical Records of John Chapman, National Archives.
- ²³Cullen, p. 29.
- ²⁴Medical Records of John Chapman, National Archives.
- ²⁵Bates, vol. I, p. 430.
- ²⁶*Ibid.*
- ²⁷E. B. Long, *The Civil War Day by Day* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), p. 378.
- ²⁸Bates, vol. I, p. 432.
- ²⁹Veteran Reserve Corps Records of John Chapman, National Archives. See also, Military Service Records of John Chapman, National Archives. Although Chapman's three year enlistment did not expire until July 1864, he re-enlisted in December 1863, under War Department General Order 191. That order implemented the War Department's policy of encouraging three-year re-enlistments. The War Department realized that the war would last several years.
- ³⁰Military Service Records of John Chapman, National Archives. See also, Dyer, vol. I, p. 1586.
- ³¹Medical Records of John Chapman, National Archives.
- ³²*Ibid.*
- ³³Veteran Reserve Corps Records of John Chapman, National Archives.
- ³⁴Henry Putnam Beers and Kenneth W. Munden, *Guide to Federal Archives Relating to the Civil War* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1962), p. 344.
- ³⁵Veteran Reserve Corps Records of John Chapman. National Archives.
- ³⁶*Ibid.* When Chapman was discharged from the service he was indebted to an army sutler, Aram Beebe, \$11.50. That amount was probably deducted from the balance of the bounty due Chapman in July 1865, \$225. At the war's end, Chapman had been paid \$175 of the \$400 re-enlistment bounty awarded him on December 27, 1863. Arlington Cemetery burial records indicate that Chapman was not buried at that cemetery; Arlington Cemetery Historian, Tom Sherlock, Historian Division, Arlington, Va. 22211.
- ³⁷General Index to Pension Files 1861-1934, T288, National Archives.

There are several other names written in the attic at Arlington House:

J. J. Lynch	J. H. Strickland
Portland, Me.	Bangor, Me.
Oct. 16, 1861	Oct. 16, '61

However, there are no military service records under these names at the National Archives. The Maine State Archives confirms that there were no Civil War soldiers from Maine under these names. In addition, the 1860 Portland and Bangor city directories at the Library of Congress do not list anyone under these names. The 1960 directories from those cities also do not list anyone under those names. The names may be those of youthful pranksters.



TOWNS IN ARLINGTON COUNTY

Of the three towns which have lain within Arlington County, the only one whose limits have been of importance to the territorial extent of the County is Alexandria . . . When that Town became a City it became a separate entity no longer within the County's bounds. Nonetheless, to complete the record, some mention should be made of the Town of Potomac and the Town of Falls Church, the first of which lay wholly within Arlington, and the second, partly so.

Falls Church is the older town. It was chartered by the General Assembly on March 30, 1875. It lay partly in Fairfax and partly in Arlington at the northwest corner of the original District of Columbia. After Arlington adopted the County Manager form of government, the residents of so much of the Town of Falls Church as lay within Arlington County sought to have the charter amended to reduce the limits of the Town to that portion which lay in Fairfax. An action was brought in 1932 and decided in 1935. It was not, however, until the next year that the order went into effect and East Falls Church merged with Arlington County.

The Town of Potomac was chartered by the Genral Assembly in 1908. It covered the area between Bellefont Avenue in the subdivision of Del Ray north to Glebe Road, west along Glebe Road to Commonwealth and then south to Bellefont. All this area was included in the annexation to Alexandria which was effected in 1929.

One other proposed town deserves mention. In 1920 a group of citizens petitioned for a town charter for Clarendon. The denial by the lower court was upheld upon appeal to the Supreme Court of Appeals of Virginia. This Court declared that all of Arlington county was a "continuous, contiguous, and homogeneous community" and as such should not be subjected to subdivision for the purpose of incorporating a town.

Excerpted from "The Boundaries of Arlington" by C. B. Rose, Jr., *Arlington Historical Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1957).