



“O may the glad time soon come when as each Thanksgiving and New Year rolls round families may again be gathered in unbroken circles and the absent ones return to be called away no more by the bugle notes of war!”

For Johannes Lefevre, the Civil War soldier who wrote this, and many other letters, he would never again get to spend a Thanksgiving at home. Like many young American boys who experienced the horrors of the Civil War, Johannes' story reveals the personal side of the War. More so than reading historical facts or a list of casualties, Johannes' letters bring to life a true American experience.

After hearing of his younger brother Peter's enlisting in the Union Army, Johannes Lefevre rushes home to New Paltz to enlist himself. Johannes musters in as a Lieutenant in the 156<sup>th</sup> regiment of the N.Y Volunteer Army. Johannes is able to move up the military ladder from second Lieutenant to Captain of his company, all the while writing to his friends and family back home.

Leaving behind the image of a hardened soldier, Johannes' letters are truthful in regard to the war, while remaining eternally optimistic about a settled life back home in New Paltz. His concern for girls and finding a wife is nothing different than you would expect a twenty-seven year old man to be thinking of, even when he is embroiled in one of the most important wars in American history.

After two years of traveling and fighting, Johannes and his company find themselves engaged in the Battle of Winchester, which was a part of General Sheridan's campaign in the Shenandoah Valley. This intense battle is fully illustrated in a letter Johannes writes to his sister Jane. While his company lost many men, the excitement from winning the battle was clear. Remaining ever the young soldier, Johannes writes home wondering what is being said about the battle and his company in the papers.

On October 17<sup>th</sup>, Johannes takes his largest jump in the 'military ladder', being commissioned as Captain. In a letter to his father, he writes that he has been given orders to be ready with the entire division at 5A.M. The Battle of Cedar Creek takes place on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1864, and was Johannes' first and last battle during his career as Captain. While this battle was an important victory for the Union Army, the cost was the loss of many young men. Johannes was mortally wounded when a "minnie ball" went through his thigh and came out through his hipbone. Being unable to move his leg, he was forced to lie on his back on the battlefield for twenty-four hours before being attended to. After this ordeal, Johannes is finally transferred to a hospital in Winchester Virginia, where Johannes' father, Josiah, crosses Rebel lines to reach him. After speaking with physicians about his condition, Josiah leaves the hospital with the knowledge that his son will be sent home shortly. However, on November 6<sup>th</sup>, Josiah receives a telegraph from Dr. West informing him that Johannes has taken a drastic turn for the worse.

The next time Josiah will see his son is when he opens the wooden casket holding Johannes' body when it has been shipped back to New Paltz.

Reading this collection of letters paints a picture of a young American soldier, but more importantly, of a young American man. While Johannes may be listed in a textbook as part of a casualty list, his letters and his story remind us of the people behind these facts. Each young soldier who died had family, loved ones and friends back home anxiously awaiting their return, and as Johannes looked forward to a time where his "unbroken circle" of family would be together once more, the Civil War would cost more than 620,000 American boys their lives.