

ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY'S FIRST CIVIL WAR BURIALS

By

George Dodge*

The First Civil War burials at Arlington National Cemetery took place on May 13, 1864, pursuant to Major General Montgomery Meigs' selection of 200 acres surrounding Arlington House as a cemetery for Union dead. According to Arlington Cemetery's Register of Burials, Private William Christman was the first soldier buried. One other soldier was buried on May 13, 1864, Private William McKinney. 124 years after their burials, the story of these two Pennsylvania privates is finally told.

William Christman's Family

William Henry Christman was born in 1843 in Lehigh County, Pennsylvania.¹ William was the second son of Jonas and Mary Ann Christman. According to census records, William's parents were Pennsylvania natives who moved from Lehigh County to Monroe County, Pennsylvania, in the 1840s.² In the mid-1850s, Jonas Christman was known to support his wife and six children as a wagon driver for a Pennsylvania farmer, E. Miller.³

In 1859, Jonas became bed-ridden for five weeks with a case of chronic rheumatism.⁴ The rheumatism left Jonas without the use of one of his arms.⁵ According to Jonas' attending physician, Dr. Scheffer, Jonas "never recovered from the attack" of rheumatism.⁶ Since Jonas was unable to perform manual labor his wife, Mary Ann, functioned as head of the household. She worked in the surrounding countryside as a mid-wife. On the Christmans' farm Mary repaired fences, took care of horses, and cultivated crops. Despite Mary's effort, the Christmans' could not maintain the mortgage payments on their eighty-nine acres of timber land. Accordingly, in 1859, their land was sold for \$125 at a foreclosure sale. The buyer was William Bonse, a Pocono farmer.⁷

The year 1860 was another time of misfortune for the Christman family. Jonas Christman, now forty, fell off a wagon and fractured his right hip bone. The accident left Jonas' right leg one and a half inches shorter than the left leg.⁸ As the Christmans struggled with their personal woes, the nation was facing its own crisis.

Brother Barnabas Enlists

The outbreak of the War of the Rebellion in April 1861, caused the State of Pennsylvania to raise regiments for the United States Government. The

Christmans' oldest son, twenty-year-old Barnabas, was among the first to volunteer for a three-year enlistment. On June 8, 1861, at Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, Barnabas F. Christman enrolled as a private in Company F, 4th Regiment Reserve Infantry, later designated as the 33rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry. William Christman did not enroll with his brother because William was only seventeen years old. Barnabas was mustered in at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on July 17, 1861.⁹ At a private's pay rate of \$13 per month, Barnabas would earn more in one year than his father had earned in the last five years. For the penny-poor Christman family, the war would yield financial gain. However, the war would also lead to further disaster.

Barnabas Christman travelled with his regiment by rail to Baltimore, Maryland, on July 2, 1861. The regiment arrived at Tenallytown, Washington, D.C., at the end of August 1861. On October 9, 1861, the 4th Regiment Pennsylvania Reserve Infantry crossed the Chain Bridge into Arlington, Virginia (then Alexandria County). Within three years from Barnabas' passage through Arlington, his brother William would have his fateful rendezvous in Arlington.¹⁰

The 4th Regiment Pennsylvania Reserve Infantry encamped near Langley, Virginia, for the winter of 1861.¹¹ Barnabas, a Pocono mountain boy who presumably had few childhood diseases, was reported as sick in December 1861.¹² In the spring of 1862, Barnabas journeyed with his regiment through the countryside toward Richmond, Virginia, as the Union Army of the Potomac attempted to capture the capital of the Confederacy. On June 30, 1862, toward the end of the Seven Day's Battle near Richmond, the 4th Pennsylvania Reserve Infantry was attacked at New Market Cross Roads (Frazier's Farm). The regiment was supporting artillery which was protecting the Union line of retreat. The 4th Pennsylvania Reserve Infantry sustained casualties of twenty-five killed and fifty-one wounded while engaged in a fierce bayonet fight with the 11th Alabama Regiment.¹³ Among those killed in action was Barnabas Christman.¹⁴ The woes of the Christman family continued to mount.

As Poor As Job's Turkey

During Barnabas' absence, younger brother William worked for local farmers William Bonse and Hiram Hay, receiving food provisions and cash.¹⁵ The federal census of 1860 lists sixteen-year-old William Christman as a laborer.¹⁶ According to Timothy Miller, a Pocono farmer who knew William "all his life," William worked for him as a farm laborer from 1860 to 1864. William also worked on his parents' lot as a tenant farmer.¹⁷

William's labor supplemented his mother's income which was derived from her work as a mid-wife and from "picking herbs in the woods for the

market." Jonas did not work from 1860 to 1864¹⁸. Prior to William's army enlistment, his father was offered a part-time job carrying mail. Isaac Stauffer, a store merchant from Housers Mill, provided Jonas with the job and a team of horses. Stauffer describes the Christmans as "poor people always in debt" and that "they were as poor as Job's turkey," despite Mary Christman's efforts as "the mainstay of the family."¹⁹ By 1864, the Christmans' possessions consisted of a few household goods, a buckboard wagon, and a cow that William had bought for the family before enlisting in the army.²⁰

William Enlists

William Christman enrolled for a three-year enlistment into Company G, 67th Pennsylvania Infantry, on March 25, 1864, at Easton, Pennsylvania. He received a \$60 advance bounty with \$240 additional bounty to be paid in installments. Service records also indicate that he was advanced a month's pay of \$13.21. At the time of his enrollment, the company descriptive roster lists William as single, 5 feet 7 1/2 inches tall with grey eyes, sandy hair, flrid complexion, a scar on the left side of his neck and three large brown moles on his back. His age is given as twenty-one. However, according to interment records which were derived from hospital records, William was twenty years old when he enlisted.²² The 1850 and 1860 federal census records corroborate that William was twenty in the spring of 1864.²³

While enroute to Washington via rail William wrote the following letter to his parents:

Philadelphia April 3, 1864

Camp Curt [Curtin] volenter [volunteer]

My dear Mother

I this morning take the opertunity to inform you a few lines thad [that] I em [am] well at the preasant [present] time ant [and] hope thad my few lines will find you the same

Father I must tel [tell] you thad I like it very good we hav enuph [enough] to eat ant drink ant more we don't want for this preasant time

Father I must tel you thad I want you to take good care of my close [clothes] ant father I want you to write me wetor [whether] you have thad note from Jacob Stauffer. I want you to take them papers all ant put them in my trunk and keep them their [there] till I come back

Father I want you to git [get] thad deed for thad land ant give thad note from Hiram Hay ant git thad money from Timothy Miller ant pay it on thad land but mind you thad you get a good deed

Father I want you to write me how the gildren [children] is wetor [whether] they ar [are] well again

Father I don't know more for to write for this preasant time

So good by for this time
from your dear son
William Henry Christman

So please excuse my poor riting for I haf to write
on my plait [plate] so I cant [can't] write as good
as I ate²⁴

The children referred to in William's letter are his brother Timothy, age seven, and sisters Anna Maria, age fifteen, Emeline, age twelve, Mary, age eleven and Sophia, an infant. Sophia was born June 13, 1863, seventeen days prior to the battle of Gettysburg.²⁵

William's letter stresses that his father obtain good title to the land the family was about to purchase. But how could the "as poor as Job's turkey" Christmans suddenly afford real property? Because William Christman unselfishly sent his advance bounty and advance pay home. According to a second letter from William, dated April 13, 1864, from his regimental camp at Brandy Station, Virginia, \$35 was sent home.²⁶ When Jonas Christman was asked at depositions in 1885, where he obtained the money to purchase land, his response was that the purchase money came largely from money sent home by William after his enlistment.²⁷ At the same deposition hearing Mary Christman states that William sent home "money from the army twice" and that it was used to purchase 226 acres of untimbered land in 1865.²⁸ The Christman family owned no taxable personal or real property, from 1860 to 1865, according to tax assessment rolls of Monroe County, Pennsylvania. From 1865 to 1881, the value of their personal property averaged \$70 per year and their real property averaged \$226 per year.²⁹ Without William's army money the Christmans would not have been able to buy land.

The length of time William spent with his regiment in camp near Culpeper, Virginia, was scarcely two weeks. It's likely he never saw his Confederate foes. On April 22, 1864, William was struck by an adversary more deadly than a Confederate soldier, i.e., disease. The 67th Pennsylvania Regimental Hospital records indicate that William had rubella, measles.³⁰ On April 30, medical orders directed that William be sent to a general hospital. He was sent to Lincoln Hospital's Ward 19 in Washington, D.C. on May 1, 1864. His bout with the measles had now brought on a second ailment, gastroenteritis or peritonitis, inflammation of the stomach and intestines.³¹ William clung to life for ten days before he died on May 11, 1864. On May 13, 1864, Private William Christman was buried at Arlington Burial Ground (later known as Arlington National Cemetery).³² It appears that no family members attended his funeral service since military service records indicate that his personal effects were sent home to his father on June 21, 1864.³³

The Second Billy Yank Burial

William H. McKinney of Company F, 17th Pennsylvania Cavalry was the second soldier buried at Arlington Burial Ground. McKinney and Christman were the only soldiers buried on the first day of soldier burials there, Friday, May 13, 1864.³⁴

McKinney enlisted at Carlisle, Pennsylvania on March 16, 1864, nine days prior to Christman's enlistment. The regimental descriptive roster lists McKinney at 5 feet 6 inches with brown eyes, dark hair and dark complexion. He was only seventeen. According to the back of McKinney's enlistment paper, his father consented to the minor's enlistment. The young soldier

signed his enlistment paper with a mark, “X,” and received \$60 advance bounty and \$13 advance pay.³⁵ This was more money than William had ever earned while working with his father at an Adams County saw mill.³⁶

Arrival in Virginia

William reached his regiment in Alexandria, Virginia, by March 25, 1864. His letter of the same date indicates that he sent \$50 home. The letter also reveals that:

[F]ortifications thrown up here that the Devil would hardly get through let lone the rebbles [sic].³⁷

A few weeks later McKinney was quartered at the Post Hospital at Camp Stoneman in Alexandria, Virginia. He had pneumonia. John D. McKinney, William’s father, travelled from Adams County, Pennsylvania to Camp Stoneman to be with his ailing son. With his father at his bedside, young William succumbed to pneumonia on May 12, 1864.³⁸ On May 13, 1864, McKinney was buried diagonally across from his fellow Pennsylvanian — William Christman.

Friday the 13th, 1864, at Arlington Burial Ground

The events surrounding the first Civil War burials at Arlington are not entirely clear. However, the likely scenario for that day is as follows. A spot one-half mile northeast of Arlington House and a few hundred yards from the Potomac River was selected for the first burials. It appears that the graves were dug by a former slave of the Robert E. Lee family, John Parks. According to the Parks family historian, John Parks dug the first grave.³⁹ Department of the Army, Arlington National Cemetery historians state that Parks, although freed from slavery in 1862, was known to have remained at Arlington House after his emancipation, performing manual labor on the grounds around the mansion.⁴⁰

Who was at the first burials and what ceremony occurred, if any? The military service records of William McKinney note that he was to “be interred with the usual military honors.” Hospital records for a soldier buried four days after Christman and McKinney indicate that a funeral service was to be conducted at 2:00 P.M. by Reverend E.W. Jackson, Chaplain, U.S. Army.⁴¹ A military funeral in 1864, according to army historians, would involve an army chaplain and possibly a bugler to sound *TAPS*. Accordingly, the evidence suggests that on May 13, 1864, Christman and McKinney received military funerals conducted by an army chaplain, possibly Reverend Jackson, at 2:00 P.M. Surely McKinney’s father, who is documented as being at his son’s bedside the day before, remained an additional day to attend his son’s funeral prior to returning to Pennsylvania. In addition, it is

likely that a small burial detail of Union soldiers were present along with the recently emancipated John Parks.

As the two Union privates were lowered into Virginia soil, the few in attendance probably were aware of certain similarities between the two soldiers. Both were young Union privates from Pennsylvania who had succumbed to disease, the largest source of fatalities during the Civil War. William Christman, twenty, had been in the army for forty-eight days. William McKinney, seventeen, had served fifty-eight days. One hundred twenty- four years later, their remains lie undisturbed in Section 27, their grave markers facing Washington, DC, the capital city whose cause they sought to defend.



William Christman's marker. Diagonally to the rear of Christman's grave is the grave of William McKinney. The markers were numbered years after the Civil War. The lodge of the superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery is fifty yards to the rear of this site.

Notes and References

- *George Dodge is an Arlington Special Justice and lawyer. He is chairman of the Civil War Heritage Committee of the Society.
We are grateful to Joseph Erwin for the accompanying photographs and to Thomas Sherlock and Kerri Childress, Arlington National Cemetery historians, Department of the Army, for their assistance in this article.
- ¹Military Service Record of William Christman, Co. G, 67th Regiment Pennsylvania Infantry, National Archives.
- ²1860 Federal census, Monroe County, Pennsylvania, Roll 1142, page 831, National Archives.
- ³Military Pension Record of William Henry Christman, Co. G, 67th Pennsylvania Infantry, Claim No. 253,99, Certificate No. 214,004, deposition E. Miller, National Archives.
- ⁴Ibid. Deposition of Jonas Christman.
- ⁵Ibid. Deposition of Timothy Miller.
- ⁶Ibid. Report of Dr. Scheffer.
- ⁷Ibid. Depositions.
- ⁸Ibid. Surgeons report.
- ⁹Military Service Record of Barnabas (Barnabus) Christman, Co. F, 4th Regiment Pennsylvania Reserve Infantry, National Archives.
- ¹⁰Samuel P. Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers 1861-1865*, 5 vols. (Harrisburg, Pa.: B. Singerly, 1869) Vol. I, p. 636.
- ¹¹Ibid. p. 637.
- ¹²Military Service Record of Barnabas Christman, National Archives.
- ¹³Bates, Vol. I, p. 638. According to Bates, Union General McCall, who was captured at New Market Cross Roads, describes the battle as follows:
Bayonets were crossed and locked in the struggle, bayonet wounds were freely given and received. I saw skulls crushed by the heavy blow of the butt of the musket, and, in short, the desperate thrusts and parries of a life and death encounter, proving indeed that Greek had met Greek, when the Alabama boys fell upon the sons of Pennsylvania."
For a Confederate account of the battle see H.R. Hogan, "Battle of Frazier's Farm," *Confederate Veteran*, Vol. I, No. 11, November 1893, pp. 333-34.
- ¹⁴Military Service Records of Barnabas Christman, National Archives.
- ¹⁵Pension of William Christman, National Archives.
- ¹⁶1860 Federal census, as above, footnote 2.
- ¹⁷Pension of William Christman, deposition of Timothy Miller, National Archives.
- ¹⁸Ibid. Deposition of Mary Christman.
- ¹⁹Ibid. Deposition of Issac Stauffer. It appears that there is no longer an area known as Housers Mill, which was a small lumber camp as late as the 1880s. However, it was in the vicinity of Tannersville and Tobyhannah, Pennsylvania.
- ²⁰Ibid. Deposition of Mary Christman.
- ²¹Military Service Record of William Christman, National Archives.
- ²²Ibid.
- ²³1860 Federal census records of Monroe County, Pennsylvania, National Archives.
- ²⁴Pension of William Christman, National Archives.
- ²⁵Ibid.
- ²⁶Ibid.
- ²⁷Ibid. Deposition of Jonas Christman.

²⁸Ibid. Deposition of Mary Christman.

²⁹Ibid. Data from Monroe County, Pennsylvania, tax assessment rolls.

³⁰Medical Records of William Christman, National Archives.

³¹Ibid.

³²Register of Burials, Arlington National Cemetery, National Archives.

³³Military Service Record of William Christman, National Archives. In 1870 Jonas' mail carrier job became a full-time position with daily delivery. On April 23, 1885, Mary Christman was granted a pension based on her dependence on William for support. She received \$8 per month, pursuant to the pension, until her death in 1902, at the age of 81. The ailing Jonas Christman appears to have predeceased his wife, sometime between 1885 and 1902.

³⁴Register of Burials.

³⁵Military Service Record of William H. McKinney, Co. F, 17th Pennsylvania Cavalry, National Archives.

³⁶Military Pension Record of William H. McKinney, Co. F, 17th Pennsylvania Cavalry, Claim No. 252,295, Certificate No. 242,638, National Archives.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid. Pages from the McKinney family Bible state that William McKinney "was borne April 13th 1847." His older brother John McKinney "was borne on Sept. 22, 1844." John McKinney enlisted in 1862, in the 1st Maryland Calvary. He survived the war, returned to Pennsylvania, was married, and had several children.

³⁹Louise Parks Gray, Parks Family Historian.

⁴⁰Thomas Sherlock and Kerri Childress, Arlington National Cemetery Historians, Department of the Army.

⁴¹Hospital Records of private Chauncey Rice, Co. K, 3rd Michigan Infantry, in the private collection of George Dodge. Rice was interred on May 18, 1864, the fifty-eighth military burial at Arlington National Cemetery. His grave is approximately ten yards from Christman's and McKinney's. Rice, similar to Christman and McKinney, was a new recruit who died of disease, typhoid fever. Military Service Record of Chauncey Rice, Co. K, 3rd Michigan Infantry, National Archives.



**This publication
has been supported
by a generous contribution
from**

The George and Carol Olmsted Foundation