

Ancestor Profile – John J. Long

This is a profile of a man who volunteered to serve in the Army during one of the deadliest conflicts in our nation's history. That decision and its consequences had quite an impact on his life thereafter. In fact, they have influenced my life to a certain extent as well. That's because the man I have written about is my great-grandfather, John J. Long.

John J. Long was born in the state of Pennsylvania in 1834. He was a son of Jacob and Elizabeth Long and was definitely not an only child. According to 1860 census data, Jacob and Elizabeth Long also had six other sons and one daughter.

When the Civil War created a need for military expansion, the Long family helped to satisfy that need in a rather significant way. On 1 September 1862, John and three of his younger brothers (William, Robert, and Jacob) mustered into federal service. All four brothers enlisted in Company C, 139th Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment at the rank of Private for a term of three years.

In the waning days of Summer 1862, John and his brothers could hardly have imagined the fate that awaited them. Places like Fredericksburg, Cold Harbor, and Spotsylvania probably didn't mean a great deal to any of them at the time. That would change in the weeks and months ahead, however, as their volunteer regiment became involved in some of the most intense fighting of the war. While John and all of his brothers would be affected by the devastation of the war, some would be affected to a much greater extent than others. None of them, however, would experience the ill effects of war more than brother William.

William was about 24 years old when he enlisted and is the only one of John's brothers who died during the war. He was killed in action at the *Battle of Cold Harbor* that took place near Mechanicsville, Virginia. An exhaustive search for his grave site proved to be inconclusive, which suggests that William might be one of the unidentified soldiers buried at *Cold Harbor National Cemetery* in Mechanicsville or possibly *Richmond National Cemetery*.

Brother Robert enlisted at age 20 and was discharged for medical reasons on 3 March 1864. He died in Parker, Pennsylvania on 8 April 1925 and is buried at the Allegheny Church Cemetery in Butler County.

Brother Jacob enlisted at age 18 and was discharged in accordance with a General Order on 17 July 1865. He died in Nebraska on 4 January 1902 and is buried at Kearney Cemetery in Buffalo County. By late Spring of 1864, Jacob was the only one of the four brothers still fit for duty.

Ten weeks after Robert was discharged and three weeks before William was killed, John sustained a battlefield injury that drastically changed his life and status in the Army. That pivotal event took place at the *Battle of Spotsylvania Court House* in Northern Virginia. On 12 May 1864, the fifth day of the battle, John was seriously wounded. As a consequence, he was never the same as he had been prior to that fateful Spring day. A short time after he was wounded, John underwent surgery on the battlefield during which his left leg was amputated.

In the July-September 2020 *Harriet Lane [Lea Camp newsletter]*, Brother Dan Purreau mentioned some of the weapons used during the Civil War. His interest in those weapons piqued my curiosity about the type of bullet that might have caused John's injury. My research revealed that one particular bullet, known as the Minié ball, was widely used by both Union and Confederate troops during the war. Its use at the *Battle of Spotsylvania Court House* is quite evident. According to Chris Mackowski in his article "Spotsylvania Court House: Day 5," for example, "one Union soldier absorbed an estimated 'five thousand' minié balls." This tragic case illustrates that the bullet was not only used during the battle, but that it was used in great quantity.

The Minié ball was named after one of its designers, a French Army officer named Claude-Etienne Minié. It was popular for a number of reasons. The bullet, for instance, was relatively



John J. Long



Minié ball

...continued on next page

Ancestor Profile – John J. Long *(continued)*

simple to load, its degree of accuracy was good, and it could travel a considerable distance. The Minié ball was also very effective. As Allen W. Howey noted in his article "Weaponry: The Rifle-Musket and the Minié Ball," the "*soft lead bullets shattered bone and ripped tissue. Overworked Civil War surgeons often had to amputate limbs wounded by Minié balls.*" This destructive nature of the Minié ball and its use at the *Battle of Spotsylvania Court House*, strongly suggest it was this type of bullet that caused the injury to John's left leg.

John was discharged from the Army on 28 June 1865. On that day, he was still recuperating at U. S. G. Hospital in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The hospital in Pittsburgh was not the first hospital he spent time in. John was initially taken to a Washington area hospital where he arrived about two weeks after he was wounded. One of the things he accomplished while being treated involved financial matters. On 2 June 1865, John applied for a pension. Although he did not include his rank on the application, official records indicate that he was a Private at that time. The records also show that John left the Army at the rank of Private, the same rank at which he had enlisted around three years earlier. In fact, his brothers Robert and Jacob were also discharged at the rank of Private, and his brother William was a Private when he was killed.

While John did not receive any promotions, he did receive something of a rather notable nature from the Army for his wartime service. It was the only award mentioned in his service record. [The publication] *Armstrong County, Pennsylvania*, Vol. 2, by J. H. Beers & Co., provides some revealing details about it. According to the book's authors, John "*received a medal from General Grant for conspicuous bravery in placing the Union flag on some works that had been captured.*" The level of recognition John received for his action implies there was a sizeable amount of risk involved and that the flag's symbolic quality was very meaningful to the soldiers in blue.

Despite the nature of his disability, John seems to have done remarkably well in civilian life. In the 1880s, for example, John was homesteading in Logan County, Colorado. Around 1889, he married Willie B. Dix of West Virginia, who was 18 years younger than him. Like John, Willie also came from a large family in which her father, Nathan Dix, made a living as a wheelwright and wagon maker. The couple lived in a sod house that John built and eventually became the parents of three daughters (Elizabeth, Jessie, and Alta). Elizabeth's middle name is Mary. The names John and Willie chose for their first daughter are notably telling. Elizabeth is the first name of John's mother and Mary is the first name of Willie's mother.

Around 1891, the Long family moved to Denver, Colorado, where they lived in a house at 1532 South Washington Avenue. John and Willie lived out the rest of their days in the Mile-High City. Willie passed away on 16 March 1901 at the age of 49. John passed on at St. Luke's Hospital in February 1911 at the age of 77. John and Willie are buried next to each other at Fairmount Cemetery, one of the city's oldest cemeteries and the final resting place of other Civil War veterans. Willie's conspicuous grave marker towers well above John's. His headstone is relatively modest in nature and includes the name of the company and regiment he served in during the war.

Some of the organizations John belonged to are quite noteworthy. He was a member of two very prominent fraternal organizations. One of these was the *Independent Order of Odd Fellows* (IOOF). John joined the IOOF around 1862 and remained a member for the rest of his life. His membership in the IOOF indicates that he was involved in helping improve people's lives through various forms of assistance the organization provides. In a personal communication (email, 30 September 2020), from Justin C. Bailey, the state's IOOF Grand Secretary, I learned a little about the scope of the IOOF in Pennsylvania around the time when John became a member. He informed me that there were "*over 1,200 Lodges in PA and tens of thousands of members.*" These numbers are rather substantial, and they highlight the social significance of the IOOF in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The other prestigious organization John belonged to was the *Grand Army of the Republic* (GAR). He was a member of *A. Lincoln Post No. 4* in Denver. John received a major assignment there on 29 November 1905. He was appointed Aide-de-Camp on the Staff of his Department Commander-in-Chief. John's membership in the GAR was beneficial in a number of ways. It afforded him the opportunity to meet and socialize with other veterans who had similar wartime experiences. It also promoted public awareness that has helped preserve his memory, the memory of his brothers, and the memory of his fellow comrades in arms as well.

....continued on next page

Ancestor Profile – John J. Long *(continued)*

This profile is somewhat revealing in relation to John's personality. One of the most apparent aspects of John's identity was patriotism. In that regard, he influenced future generations. John's oldest daughter Elizabeth, for instance, was a Navy Nurse during the First World War. She later joined the *American Legion* and was a member of *Post 255* in National City, California. Elizabeth's daughter, Eleanor, was a very patriotic person too. She served in the *Women's Army Corps* during the early days of the Cold War. Eleanor's son, Nelson, is also a Cold War veteran. He belongs to a number of patriotic organizations and is very proud to be a descendant of John J. Long.

Sources: Service and death records were obtained from ancestry.com. General Index Cards and John's pension application were obtained from fold3.com. Burial records were obtained from FindAGrave.com. From Newspapers.com, I obtained John's obituary in the Denver Post (Feb 16, 1911, pg. 3), details about his homestead in the National City Star News (Jan 22, 1959, pg. 1C), and information relating to his injury in The Pittsburgh Daily Commercial (May 18, 1864, pg. 1/June 1, 1864, pg. 2). Other sources that provided useful information are U. S. Census data and a G.A.R. roster [from] Lincoln Post 4 in Denver, Colorado dated June 18, 1910. Discharge information was obtained from History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861-5, Vol. IV, 1870, pg. 391 and Register of Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861-1865, Vol. 12, pg. 752-753. Details about John's medal are in Armstrong County, Pennsylvania, Vol. 2, 1914, pg. 950, and information about John's Department level appointment is mentioned in Journal, Volumes 40-41, by the Grand Army of the Republic, 1906, pg. 403. Allen W. Howey's article describing the Minie ball is in the October 1999 issue of Civil War Times Magazine and Chris Mackowski's article about Minie ball use at the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House can be found at <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/certain-death>. Photo Credits: Pvt. John J. Long, 1860s, Courtesy Carlisle Barracks.

....submitted by descendant Brother Nelson Thibault