

## Ancestor Profile – Private William Long

The December 2020 issue of the *Harriet Lane* featured the profile of my great-grandfather, John J. Long, who served as a Private during the Civil War with *Co. C, 138<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry*. I'm delighted to now present a profile of my great-granduncle, William Long, one of my great-grandfather's brothers.

This is a brief profile of a man who volunteered to serve in the Union Army during one of the most critical times in our nation's history. His decision would entail dire consequences and provide me with an intriguing mystery I've yet to solve. The courageous individual I am writing about is my great-granduncle, William Long.

William was born about 1838 in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania to Jacob and Elizabeth Long. Census data collected in 1860 indicates that William had six brothers and one sister. On September 1, 1862, William and three of his brothers (John, Robert, and Jacob) mustered into federal service at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. They all enlisted for a term of three years with *Company C, 139<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment*.

In the ensuing months after William's enlistment, the regiment he served in would be involved in a number of significant battles. One of the most notable of those battles took place in the Summer of 1863 in and around a Pennsylvania town called Gettysburg.

In the Spring of 1864, misfortune befell William's brother John (*my great-grandfather*). John was seriously wounded at the *Battle of Spotsylvania Court House* on May 12<sup>th</sup>. Shortly thereafter, his left leg was amputated during a battlefield surgery.

The following month, William's military service also ended in a dismal manner - less than two years after he mustered in. On June 3, 1864, he was killed in action at the *Battle of Cold Harbor*. That much is known from regimental records. What remains a mystery to this day is the whereabouts of William's gravesite.

William's body might well have been laid to rest at Cold Harbor National Cemetery in Mechanicsville, Virginia. The cemetery is the final resting place of over 1,000 unidentified Union soldiers who died at Cold Harbor and areas near there.

It's also possible that William's body was buried at Richmond National Cemetery. This is because some of the Union soldiers killed at Cold Harbor were taken there for burial. More than 5,000 unknown Union soldiers are among those buried at Richmond National Cemetery.



One reason why so many Union soldiers at these and other national cemeteries were not identified is that the Army did not issue identification tags (*aka. 'dog tags'*) during the Civil War. Even though some soldiers did have ID tags, they were unofficial in nature. One form of unofficial ID tag, for instance, was a small disc made of soft metal engraved with a soldier's name and other information. Some soldiers simply wrote their names on a piece of paper pinned to their clothing.

William may have been buried as an unknown soldier, but he is remembered in a number of ways. One of those ways is by two prominent stone monuments located on the Gettysburg battlefield that include the name of William's volunteer regiment. Another way that William is remembered is by the devoted efforts of the *Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War*, whose members are dedicated to honoring Union veterans in ways that create a greater awareness of who they were - and what they did for their country.

... submitted by descendant Nelson E. Thibault  
1860's photo of Pvt. William Long courtesy of Carlisle Barracks.



Pvt. William Long

