

“A Remarkable Case”: A Surgeon’s Letter to the Huntington County Globe

It would have taken an extraordinary set of wounds to surprise a Union surgeon four years into the bloody war. A remarkable letter buried in the pages of the *Huntington County Globe* in August 1865, however, details just such a case and gives us a glimpse into the rigors of life as a soldier and into the practice of medicine during the Civil War. Orderly Sergeant Michael Logan of the Sixteenth Pennsylvania Cavalry had the misfortune of being treated for so many grievous battle injuries that in August 1865, a week after Logan’s company had mustered out in Richmond, Virginia, J. E. P., the surgeon of the ward at the York, Pennsylvania, hospital wrote a letter to Logan’s local newspaper describing the case.

Orderly Sergeant Michael M. Logan of Orbisonia, Huntingdon County, a member of Co. M, 16th Pa. Cav., who enlisted on the 19th day of September, 1862, and who is at present a patient in the Ninth Ward of this hospital, has received no less than 14 wounds in the service of his Country. At the battle of Middleburg, in Loudon County, Va., which took place on the 19th of June, 1863, he received 11 wounds. While acting as a dismounted skirmisher, he became detached from his comrades, and was assailed by a mounted Rebel who ordered him to surrender, which he refused to do; and five more Rebels rode up shouting, “Kill him.” The Sergeant bravely defended himself for a time, until finally he fell, having received 11 wounds, as above stated, and was left for dead by the “chivalrous” Southerners. He has subsequently been wounded in other engagements, as the following statement will show. Notwithstanding all these wounds, the Sergeant is not seriously disabled.¹

As the surgeon related, Logan suffered fourteen wounds in three different engagements. At the battle of Middleburg in Virginia in June 1863, Confederate soldiers surrounded a dismounted and isolated Logan. Rather than take him captive, the “chivalrous southerners,” as the surgeon satirically called them, shot him once with a pistol and hacked at him with their sabers. The wounds looked deadly enough to cause the Confederates to leave him. After seven months of hospitalization and

¹ “A Remarkable Case,” letter from J. E. P., *Huntington (PA) Globe*, Aug. 23, 1865; Military Service File Michael M. Logan, National Archives and Record Administration.

recuperation he rejoined his unit. Then, in late May 1864 the Sixteenth Regiment saw action at Haw's Shop, Virginia, where a minié ball struck him in the elbow. Another six months of medical treatment left him with a permanently limited range of motion "of about 45 degrees." How a cavalryman could continue to ride and shoot with such a limitation is not clear from the documentary record. Still, Logan returned to the Army of the Potomac at the end of November 1864 at its entrenchments near Petersburg for the final stage of the war in the Eastern Theater. Ever the target for secessionists, he now took another pistol ball, this time through the left shoulder and into the neck, "producing paralysis of the left side of the tongue." This wound came in the Battle of Amelia Springs on April 5, 1865, two days after Richmond had fallen and four days before Lee would surrender.²

Logan's return to duty each time speaks to the perseverance of Union soldiers—an important factor in Union victory, as historians have shown. An experienced cavalry soldier would have been hard to replace by late 1863. Certainly a new draftee could not step into his stirrups and be his equal. When Logan returned to the Sixteenth Regiment, the Army of the Potomac needed all the support it could garner. One suspects that Logan may have been inspirational, having suffered, survived, and yet come to serve until the end of the war.³

The letter also gives interesting insight into Civil War medicine. Popular perception of Civil War medicine is based on a brutal caricature of surgery as little more than butchery and a belief that hygiene put all who were treated in danger of greater harm than if left alone. Yet, while J. E. P. does not describe how Logan was treated, he almost certainly was treated with anesthesia, as that had become the standard of care before the war. Moreover, the treatment Logan received in 1863, 1864, and 1865 represented a system of military medicine getting progressively better and attending to patients more quickly thanks in part to soldiers such as Logan who provided surgeons with plenty of experience, as well as to the Army of the Potomac's director of medicine, Pennsylvanian Jonathan Letterman.⁴ Other documents tell us that after his experiences in Lincoln

² "A Remarkable Case."

³ Reid Mitchell, "The Perseverance of the Soldiers," in *Why The Confederacy Lost*, ed. Gabor S. Boritt (New York, 1992), 109–32.

⁴ Alfred Jay Bollet, *Civil War Medicine: Challenges and Triumphs* (Tucson, AZ, 2002), 1–5; Ira M. Rutkow, *Bleeding Blue and Gray: Civil War Surgery and the Evolution of American Medicine* (New York, 2005), 120–27.

hospital, Mount Pleasant hospital, Summit House, Satterlee hospital, and York General Hospital, Logan returned to active duty and lived a long life, which speaks to the skill and attention of medical corps staff. Indeed, J. E. P.'s concern for his "remarkable" patient extended to his interest in increasing Logan's reputation at home. Michael Logan lived a reasonably long life despite his wounds and close calls in battle. He died in late 1918 having survived his first wife and three of his children.⁵

Pennsylvania's newspapers remain wonderful sources for local perspectives on this great national trauma of the Civil War. Published letters from soldiers and others updated locals on companies or regiments formed in the area, brought the grievous news of lost comrades and friends, or described the quotidian camp experience. These public letters are quite distinct from the professional reporting and editorializing that dominated newspaper content and from more private letters sent to family members. And they are all there and widely available, not only in local libraries and county historical societies but digitally through Access Pennsylvania, Penn State University Libraries' Pennsylvania Newspaper Collection, and subscription databases from Gale and Readex, Nineteenth-Century US Newspapers and Early American Newspapers. Historians may feel that newspapers are well pored over, but Pennsylvania produced over 1,500 titles during the decade of the 1860s. In them are many more gems hidden in plain sight.⁶

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⁵ Pension Claim Report 60034. Apr. 20, 1887, Civil War Pension Claims, National Archives and Record Administration.

⁶ The 1,500 figure comes from searching in <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search/titles/>. The Pennsylvania State University collection has over fifty papers digitized and is available at <http://digitalnewspapers.libraries.psu.edu/>