

THE "WAR HISTORY" OF CORPORAL FUNK

By Matt Masich

A bitterly cold February rain fell all morning on the Yankee soldiers' log huts outside Fredericksburg, Virginia. It had rained all night, too, and before that was snow. A lanky, red-haired 21-year-old corporal, Jacob B. Funk, kept dry in his tiny log "palace," sitting by the fireplace in the winter quarters he shared with a few of his comrades from Company A of the 62nd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry.

It was a far cry from the balmy day in July a year and a half earlier when he had enlisted amid the patriotic fervor of the opening days of the Civil War. The gloomy weather mirrored the Army of the Potomac's spirits at the start of 1863. Hope for the Union cause had ebbed to its lowest point, morale battered by a string of defeats.

Corporal Funk in
civilian clothing.
Ken Turner Collection.



"The shells came hissing over
our heads, & taring [sic] up
the earth in every direction, &
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was a trying place."

~CORPORAL FUNK

Funk was recovering from a bad cold, but his mood was lightened by the letter he had gotten from John Patton, an old schoolmate back home some two years his junior. At 10 a.m., with rain splashing outside, he started to pen his reply. Funk asked about the changes that had come since he went away—who had gotten married, and whether the teenaged Patton had been “paying respects to some one of our fair young maidens.”¹ Patton had asked about the soldier’s life, but Funk must have found it impossible to fit it all into a single letter.²

“John, I want you to give my love to all my old comrades in school,” Funk wrote. “Tell them that iff [sic] I am spared to get back I shall pay them a visit and tell them some good yarns about war that they will hardly believe.”

During the course of 1863, Funk sent his friend a 25-part serialized “war history,” chronicling in gritty detail what it was like to be in the middle of some of the most important fighting of the Civil War. It is a window into soldiering, with some surprises along the way.

Jacob Funk was born November 23, 1841, in Fayette County, Pennsylvania. His only known family member was a brother, William, who lived in Sewickleyville (now Sewickley) in 1864. Funk was apparently an orphan; in a letter to Patton, he mentioned receiving a parcel with a pound cake and dried beef from a “lady friend,” saying that “it makes me glad to know that though I am an orpahn [sic] I have plenty of friends ... I must say that for a

stranger I was beloved & respected by all.”

While on campaign in the Civil War, he wrote that the Rappahannock River in Virginia reminded him of the Youghiogheny River, to the east of his hometown of Fayette City, about 25 miles south of Pittsburgh along the Monongahela River.

Funk didn’t grow up in a religious household, but at 16 he sneaked off to the dedication of the new Little Redstone

Methodist Church, which still exists today. He converted and became a devout member of the church, often leading prayer meetings at home and during the war.

The Civil War began on April 12, 1861. On either July 4 or July 22 of that year,³ Funk enlisted in Company A of the 62nd Pennsylvania in Allegheny City (now Pittsburgh’s North Side neighborhood). He was 19 when he volunteered, and at a height of



Colonel Sam Black, photographed at Cargo's studio in Pittsburgh, formed the 62nd Pennsylvania regiment that Funk joined. Black was killed in June 1862 during the Seven Days' Battles near Richmond, Virginia.

Kraus/Messick Collection.

six feet, one inch was one of the tallest members of his company. He is listed as having red hair, brown eyes, and a fair complexion. Though Funk carried the state flag later in the war, he entered his first campaign carrying a rifle.

The colonel who formed the regiment, Samuel Black, was a Pittsburgh native who fought in the Mexican War. Black had been territorial governor of Nebraska, a post he resigned to return to Pennsylvania to help put down the rebellion.

All across Pennsylvania, volunteer “home guard” companies came together to fight the secessionists when war broke out in April—so many, in fact, that many were initially turned away. But by Independence Day, Congress authorized the creation of hundreds more regiments. The 62nd Pennsylvania started recruiting at a massive Fourth of July celebration in Allegheny City and filled its ranks in a matter of weeks. Funk was one of more than 360,000 Pennsylvanians—about 17 percent of the total Union forces—who served in the Civil War.

The 62nd Pennsylvania’s first combat came on May 27, 1862, at the Battle of Hanover Courthouse, during the Peninsula Campaign near the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia. Other elements of the 5th Corps had already begun the fight as Funk and his comrades marched to the front lines. The rebels were falling back, so Funk’s regiment pressed forward. They were astonished when they began to hear “volley after volley of musketry” behind them. They retraced their steps to come to the aid of Union forces that had been surprised by a Rebel attack. Funk’s brigade arrived in the nick of time to help them, driving the Confederates from the battlefield.

The next day, he walked over the scene of the battle and saw the dead being gathered for burial. He looked at the corpses, saddened to think “how many hearts and homes would be made miserable and dessolute [desolate], but such is war. Men rush together to shoot each other down like so many dogs.”



All images of Jacob B. Funk were lost to history until spring 2013, when historian Ken Turner located a photo album showing many men of the 62nd Pennsylvania’s Company A. The origin of the album, found in a Pittsburgh attic, is unknown, but the discovery, especially of Funk, was astounding after so many years.

This photograph of Corporal Funk was taken in Philadelphia, likely between July and October of 1863 while he was recovering from his Gettysburg wound in Ward B of Satterlee U.S.A. General Hospital in West Philadelphia. The photographer, R. Richardson, placed an advertisement in multiple issues of the hospital’s newsletter during Funk’s time there, offering “pictures of every style at the lowest prices.” Funk mentions some recently taken photographs in a letter he wrote to his friend John Patton on October 20, 1863, shortly before he left the hospital. “[L]et me know to[o] if you got my Photographs as I have not yet heard from them & the man says he sent them,” he wrote. A “photograph album” was included in an 1864 list of Funk’s possessions.

Funk made the most of his stay in Philadelphia. “I have got acquainted with some People in West Phila[delphia,] one family of which are very kind,” he wrote on August 5, 1863. “I was at their House over night, & went to church with them Last Sabbath.” In the same letter, he mentioned teaching a class of boys at Sunday school. “[S]o you see it makes no difference where I go I always get something to do, & I have no objections to such work for it is very pleasant[.]”

By the next month, his Philadelphia friends had “become almost as dear as Brothers & sisters[.]” The other soldiers in his hospital ward were another matter. “I am Ward Master yet & have my hands full,” Funk wrote. “I have some very bad boys to deal with[;] they have been trying to get the upper hand of me but I guess I can keep up with them[.] I have had to report some of them for bad conduct.”

Funk’s gunshot wound healed quickly, and he rejoined his regiment at the end of October 1863.

Funk found himself standing alone and was about to retreat to keep up with his comrades when he heard regiment commander Lieutenant Colonel Hull calling for the boys to rally on the colors.



Lieutenant Colonel James C. Hull, Funk's Company A commander, took charge of the 62nd Pennsylvania after the death of Colonel Black. He died from injuries during the Wilderness Campaign in May 1864. A GAR Post in Pittsburgh was later named in his honor.

Ken Turner Collection.

There was a lull in the campaign until June 25, the start of the Seven Days' Battles outside of Richmond, which ended with the Union Army retreating after a week of hard fighting. The most decisive of the battles was Gaines' Mill, in which the Union 5th Corps was forced to retreat after a day of intense combat. Funk and the 62nd Pennsylvania were in the middle of the action.

Funk fired all the ammunition in the upper part of his cartridge box, so he sat down to refill it while rebel bullets flew over him "like so many bumblebees." In the heat of battle, Funk was separated from his regiment. After rejoining his comrades, the regiment gave the rebels one last volley before retreating. "There was nothing but a confused mass of men running in every direction," Funk said. Colonel Black was killed at the battle, and command of the regiment fell to Funk's company commander, James C. Hull.

The regiment had another bloody day on July 1 at Malvern Hill, the final battle of the campaign. The Union soldiers hit the deck as Rebel cannons fired at them, with shells bursting all around Funk. "I tell you, that is what tries [sic] a man's courage, to lay on the ground in front of the enemy & listen to the iron hail coming thick over your head, making you think every one would take your head with it," he wrote.

The Rebel infantry attacked. The 62nd Pennsylvania at first held its ground, but retreated and regrouped when more Confederates appeared on the right flank. A bullet struck Funk's rifle, cutting the ramrod in two and splintering the wooden stock before slamming into his full canteen, where the bullet stopped.

"I hardly knew what was up," Funk said. "The shock was like as iff [sic] someone had thrown a club at me."

He looked around for another gun, taking one from a wounded comrade. He fired another round before he heard the wounded color bearer cry for him to take the flag.

"I threw down my gun and took the flag & raised it up," Funk recalled. "I had hardly turned round when a bullet struck my left rist [sic], just missing the joint & entering at the back, lodged on the inside."

Funk called for someone else to take the flag before heading toward the rear, grasping his wrist with his right hand to stop the bleeding. He felt faint as he reached the hospital. A surgeon tried to remove the bullet, but "as there were others coming in worse than I was, he told me he had not time to take it out." Funk proceeded about a mile further before finding another hospital, where the bullet was extracted. In severe pain, Funk was given "a sip of brandy & then a little soup" before lying down to sleep on corn husks next to fellow soldiers who had lost legs or arms.

Funk spent a month recuperating in the Army hospital at Portsmouth, Virginia, before returning to his regiment at Harrison's Landing. His comrades were astonished to see him back—they had heard he would lose his hand. He hadn't, but Funk's wrist had not healed enough to use a rifle. He had already proven himself by rescuing the colors at Malvern Hill so he was made color bearer. Funk carried the state flag, which looked like the U.S. flag with the Pennsylvania state seal in the canton. The regiment also had another color bearer who carried the national flag.

The men chosen to carry the flag were the bravest and most reliable—and they had to be, as the color bearers stood at the front and center of the battle line. The bright banners were sometimes the only things visible through



The flag Funk carried for the 62nd Pennsylvania regiment.

Pennsylvania Capitol Preservation Committee, 1985.006.

the thick gun smoke, so they were often the only way generals could track their regiments' progress amidst the confusion of battle, writes Michael Dreese in "Fighting and Dying for the Colors at Gettysburg" in *Civil War Times*.⁴ "In the deadly close-quarters combat that ensued, the sight of the flag floating above the chaos steeled the resolve of the men," Dreese writes. "If the line gave way, the men usually could be counted on to rally around the

colors." Because the flag was so important to battlefield communication, not to mention as a symbol of the state and country, the enemy concentrated its fire on the color bearers, who suffered a much higher casualty rate than ordinary soldiers.

The Army of the Potomac followed the Confederates to the Rappahannock River, where it spent late November and early December camped at Falmouth, Virginia,

across the river from Fredericksburg. (Funk spelled it Fredericksburgh, with an "h" like Pittsburgh.) On December 11, the Union troops began to cross the Rappahannock on pontoon bridges to attack the Rebels. Funk's regiment waited two frosty nights for their turn, which came on December 13. Funk spent that morning watching the Union assault on Marye's Heights, where the Confederate forces, sheltered behind a stone wall, cut down successive waves of bluecoats.

West Phila. Oct 20th/63

Mr John S Patton

Dear friend

I arrived safe in Philadelphia last evening being on the cars since 2 1/2 A.M. to 5 P.M. you may be sure I was glad when we got here. my fullough is up today I shall not report til tomorrow. I then expect to be traveling for the Regt I enjoyed myself very well while at home I had a very fine time in Allegheny & the country there. I have no news to write at present but think will have some the next time. John if you could lend me five Dollars til next Pay day I

would be very thankful as it took all I had to get back on so that I have none left I merely ask the favour if you can do so without injuring yourself in writing direct to the Regt I let me know to if you got my Photographs as I have not yet heard from them & the man says he sent them. The weather is very fine here today the sun shines very warm. things are going on as usual.

excuse my short letter & poor writing for this time give my respects to all inquiring friends I remain as ever your

Letters from Funk dated Sept. 8 and Oct. 20, 1863.

HHC Detre L&A, MSS 126.

At about 1 p.m., his division's bugle sounded, and the regiment crossed the river, passed through town, and set out for the open field that led to Marye's Heights. "As soon as we emerged from the town we were exposed to a raking fire from the rebel batteries," Funk wrote. "The shells came hissing over our heads, & taring [sic] up the earth in every direction, & bursting over us. I tell you it was a trying place."

The Union regiment ahead of them retreated in panic. "Some of our boys got scared & broke," Funk admitted. He found himself standing alone and was about to retreat to keep up with his comrades when he heard regiment commander Lieutenant Colonel Hull calling for the boys to rally on the colors. "I then stood my ground & taking my cap off I turned & called as loud as I could yell to rally on the colors," he said.

The regiment advanced in good order, despite the withering fire coming from the Rebels behind the stone wall. They laid down when they reached the front lines. While they were lying there, a man next to Funk was struck in the head by a bullet, killing him instantly. The regiment soon moved forward.

"I got up in front & gave two or three cheers & planted the flag & then sat down to keep from getting my pate taken off, for I tell you there were plenty of bullets hunting me," Funk remembered. "It is a pretty [sic] hot place beside the colors as the enemy always try to shoot down the flag, but they only put one hole through the flag the whole time."

His comrades fired over his head, one firing so close that the muzzle blast scorched Funk's neck. No Union soldiers reached the stone wall. When night fell, Funk's regiment slept on the ground behind a slight ridge where they had been pinned down, 30 or 40 yards from the Confederate lines.

"The ground was covered almost with dead & wounded," he said. "I had no blanket, & I thought I would freeze, having my knapsack in the town."

They hugged the ground all the next day

and night as well; the Rebels shot at anyone who raised his head. The regiment withdrew to town at about 10 p.m. and slept on the pavement for a few hours before retreating back across the river.

The dispirited Union Army spent December 1862 through April 1863 in winter camp at Falmouth. In January, Funk and Patton struck up their correspondence. Funk wrote most of his "war history" during the downtime.

The army resumed the offensive in late April. The Union forces suffered another defeat

If Funk and his comrades needed motivation, the defense of their home state surely provided it. The men gave three cheers as they entered the Keystone State, and they kept marching until 11 p.m., when they were about eight miles from Gettysburg. The troops awoke before dawn and resumed the hard march, arriving at the Union lines behind Cemetery Hill that morning.

At about 2 p.m., Funk noticed orderlies and aides running in every direction, and he heard the boom of cannon to the army's left. "The ball has opened," the soldiers exclaimed.

"I got up in front & gave two or three cheers & planted the flag & then sat down to keep from getting my pate taken off, for I tell you there were plenty of bullets hunting me."

at Chancellorsville in the opening days of May, though Funk's regiment did not have much role in the fighting. In June, the Union Army was again on the move, this time following Confederate General Robert E. Lee's army north through Maryland, marching as much as 20 miles a day. On July 1, the Union and Confederate armies collided at Gettysburg, the three-day battle resulting in a Union victory that turned the tide of the Civil War.

The 426 men of Funk's regiment were still marching on the first day of battle. Before they crossed the state line into Pennsylvania, Lieutenant Colonel Hull stopped the regiment to give a speech. It was vital the men do their duty faithfully now that they had reached Pennsylvania, Hull admonished. The men had seen many battles, but this was the first and only time they would fight on their native soil.

The Union 3rd Corps had advanced into the areas known as the Peach Orchard and the Wheat Field, where they were in danger of being overrun by the Rebels. The 5th Corps, including the 62nd Pennsylvania, was sent to the rescue. Funk's regiment was part of Colonel Jacob Sweitzer's brigade, which took up positions behind a low stone wall at the western edge of the Wheat Field.

Just as they arrived, the enemy unleashed a rebel yell and attacked the regiment to Funk's left, the 32nd Massachusetts. Sweitzer's brigade pushed back the Rebels, but Union troops elsewhere were faltering. The brigade was ordered to fall back across the Wheat Field to the woods to the east, only to be asked to cross the field again in a renewed Union attack.

This back-and-forth movement was typical of the fighting on Gettysburg's second

day. As historian Shelby Foote describes in *The Civil War: A Narrative, Vol. 2: Fredericksburg to Meridian*, “From Little Round Top to the northern edge of the wheat field, the fighting degenerated into a bloody squabble as regiment fought regiment, alternately driving and being driven.”⁵

The brigade marched into the Wheat Field, but the men soon realized that Confederates had moved into the woods behind them and to their right, cutting them off from the rest of the army. They had to fight their way out, engaging in fierce hand-to-hand combat.

“The battle now raged in all its fury as foe grappled with foe and the bayonet was freely used,” Funk penned. He heard a Confederate officer demand that the Yankees surrender, but a man from Funk’s company used the butt of his rifle as a club and smashed the Rebel’s head.

The regiment retreated, fighting all the way. The left flank was hurrying back to the main Union lines, but the right flank was entangled with the enemy. Funk knew the location of the flag was an important way to keep the regiment together, so he slowed down to wait for the right flank to catch up. Just then, he came upon some Rebel prisoners who had been captured a short time before.

In a brief but important passage, Funk relates a scene rarely recorded in Civil War narratives: “The bullets were falling like hail & the guard that had the prisoners ran and left the prisoners go when they immediately picked up guns and began to shoot our men.”

One of the prisoners leveled his gun at Funk and demanded he surrender the colors or be shot.

“I thought that was a rather saucy demand & I could not see the point,” Funk said. “I looked at him a moment then turning round I called out, ‘Some of you shoot that man.’”

There was only one other Yankee with Funk, but the spooked Rebel looked around to see if there were more coming. The momentary distraction gave Funk the chance to make a break for it.

“I took leg bail for security and increased the distance between him and me very fast,” he said. He ran toward his regiment, leaping over a stone wall with the flag.

“I then went straight ahead when directly I heard the report of a gun just behind me,”

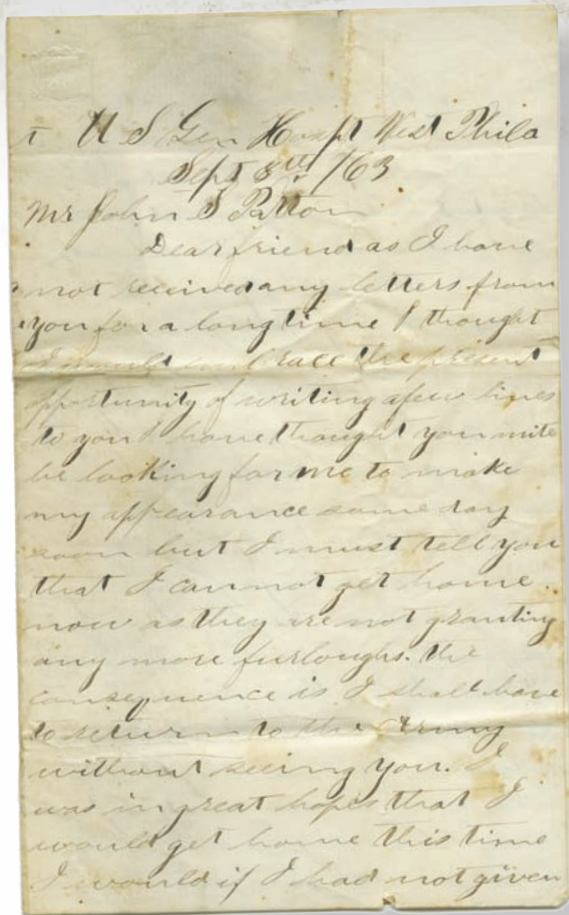
Funk said. “I just concluded that was for me and sure enough the ball struck my arm four or five inches from the shoulder passing under the bone and coming out in the chest near the arm pit.”

Funk called out for one of his comrades to take the state colors. He handed them off and hurried out of danger. Funk was lucky. Sergeant Isaac Osborn, the color bearer who carried the regiment’s national flag, was shot dead and his flag captured. The commander of the 4th Michigan, the Union regiment next to Funk’s in the Wheat Field, was fatally bayoneted while wrestling with the enemy over his flag.



James C. Thudhope, Company A, from Allegheny, Pennsylvania, was killed July 2, 1863, during the intense fighting in the Wheat Field at Gettysburg. This extremely rare one-quarter plate tintype shows him in *chasseur* attire.

Ken Turner Collection.



The tens of thousands of words young Jacob B. Funk penned to his friend John Patton remind us that each of those casualties was a real person, a friend to others.

Funk made his way to a field hospital and was sent by train two days later — July 4—to a U.S. Army hospital in Philadelphia. He spent more than two months recovering there. As always, he quickly made friends, became a ward master at the hospital, and taught Sunday school at a local church. He was able to take a short furlough to visit Allegheny City, though it is unclear whether he was able to meet with his friend Patton.

Funk had volunteered for three years and was due to muster out of service in July 1864, but at Christmas 1863 he chose to sign up for another three years. On Christmas Eve, he wrote to Patton of his decision.

“Well John I suppose you will be surprised to hear that I am going to reenlist,” Funk said. “I am in for to see the war over if spared so long which I think will not be very long for I think the Johnnies [rebels] are pretty nearly played out.”

Funk asked his friend about the “spelling schools” back home—evening spelling bees

that doubled as social events for young people. “I would like to be at some of them,” he said. “I wish the war was over. I would like to be up there awhile to stir up some life among the young folks.”

Fate would have it otherwise.

In May 1864, General Ulysses S. Grant, now in command of all Union armies, launched the Overland Campaign against Lee’s army in Virginia. The 62nd Pennsylvania got through the brutal Battle of the Wilderness relatively intact, then advanced toward Spotsylvania Courthouse before being stopped by the Confederates.

On May 12, after a standoff of several days, a charge on the Rebels’ defensive positions was ordered up and down the Union line. The 62nd Pennsylvania’s assault failed, with 126 men wounded or killed. Regiment commander Lieutenant Colonel Hull was mortally wounded. Funk was shot in his right side, piercing his lung. He was among the wounded sent to Mount Pleasant Army Hospital in Washington, D.C., where he arrived on May 16.

“Patient continued to sink from the date of his admission,” his hospital treatment records said. “Palliative measures were used.” There was nothing doctors could do for him but ease his suffering.

Funk died on May 24, 1864, at 10:35 a.m. He was buried two days later in the rose garden of Robert E. Lee’s estate near Washington, D.C., which was soon dedicated as Arlington National Cemetery. He was among the very first soldiers

buried there. His brother William picked up his belongings, which included a pistol and belt, guitar, photograph album, and scissors.

Funk was one of 15,265 Pennsylvanians killed or mortally wounded in battle in the Civil War. Counting both Union and Confederates, more than 700,000 died before the war ended in 1865. Though each death was a personal tragedy for the loved ones left behind, most of the dead have passed from memory. The tens of thousands of words young Jacob B. Funk penned to his friend John Patton remind us that each of those casualties was a real person, a friend to others. ★

Matt Masich is a staff writer with *Colorado Life Magazine*. As a student at the University of Pittsburgh, where he earned his B.A. in History, Masich transcribed the war correspondence of Jacob B. Funk housed in the Senator John Heinz History Center’s archives.

¹ The letters of Jacob B. Funk are housed in the Thomas & Katherine Detre Library & Archives at the Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, Pa. The letters quoted in this article come from that collection.

² John S. Patton papers c. 1851-1926 [manuscript]. Thomas & Katherine Detre Library & Archives at the Senator John Heinz History Center, MSS 126, Box 1.

³ Funk’s enlistment is listed on documents from both those dates. According to Ken Turner, co-author of *The Civil War in Pennsylvania: A Photographic History* (2012) and writing a regimental history of the 62nd (in which his great-great-grandfather served), there was a range of dates because the regiment was organized under a federal mandate, rather than under state authority like most units, and it took time to sort out the resulting confusion. E-mail of March 26, 2013.

⁴ Michael Dreese, “Fighting and Dying for the Colors at Gettysburg” *Civil War Times*, July 2007, 37.

⁵ Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative, Vol. 2: Fredericksburg to Meridian* (New York: Random House, 1963), 507.