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## To My Great Great Grand Uncle - On the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary of your Death

John M. Rudy  
*Gettysburg College*

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# To My Great Great Grand Uncle - On the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary of your Death

## Abstract

Dear William Henry,

I'm writing this standing near the spot where you died, exactly 150 years ago nearly to the second. I'm typing on a tiny screen, a technological marvel that lets me share the stories of men like you with the world instantly.

They've put up a monument to you and the 17 other men who died along with you along the banks of Plum Run creek. We call this place "The Valley of Death" now. I think you among all people who have walked this green earth would understand why.... [*excerpt*]

## Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Civil War Ancestors, Valley of Death

## Disciplines

Cultural History | History | Military History | Public History | Social History | United States History

## Comments

*Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public* is written by alum and adjunct professor, John Rudy. Each post is his own opinions, musings, discussions, and questions about the Civil War era, public history, historical interpretation, and the future of history. In his own words, it is "a blog talking about how we talk about a war where over 600,000 died, 4 million were freed and a nation forever changed. Meditating on interpretation, both theory and practice, at no charge to you."

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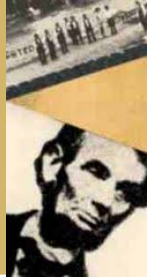
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# Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

[www.civilwarconnect.com](http://www.civilwarconnect.com)



## To My Great Great Grand Uncle - On the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary of your Death

**TUESDAY, JULY 2, 2013**

To: My Great Great Grand Uncle

From: John

### **On the Occasion of the 150th Anniversary of your Death**

Dear William Henry,

I'm writing this standing near the spot where you died, exactly 150 years ago nearly to the second. Im typing on a tiny screen, a technological marvel that lets me share the stories of men like you with the world instantly.

They've put up a monument to you and the 17 other men who died along with you along the banks of Plum Run creek. We call this place "The Valley of Death" now. I think you among all people who have walked this green earth would understand why.

I mourn your death. I don't rightly understand why, to be honest (no offense). You've been dead a century and a half, anyone who ever loved you and hugged you and lectured you and scolded your transgressions and looked up to you as their honest son or brother is long gone.

I never knew you. And yet I mourn.

I stand in front of this cold slab of marble and bronze and I can't help but cry. I still can't tell exactly why.

God, how things have changed since you died. No, not simply since. *Because* you died. Men walk free because you died. Our nation is whole because you died. I can stand here and mourn you today a free man in a free nation that is always trying to extend that freedom to the darkest corners of our own nation and the globe because you died.

I wish I had known you. Not a day goes by living in this town I don't wish I could have met you. I live just up the road from where you die; your blood in this soul brought me to plant my feet here.

I am who I am because of you.

I don't know why you fought. It pains me that I don't know. Maybe it was to free 4 million men held beneath the cruel yoke of a terrible and deadly institution. You certainly grew up in a hotbed of progressive thought on who in America should be free and why we all should fight for that freedom. Maybe not.

Maybe it was because you wanted adventure. You certainly found it here, a terrible, horrific adventure from which you couldn't escape. A British author, in a children's book he wrote long after your blood mingled with this dust, wrote that, "to die will be an awfully big adventure." Maybe it was.

Maybe it was to defend your nation. You did, after all, join the U.S. Regulars, not some fly-by-night volunteer unit from Madison County. I've always thought that meant something, like you had more of a dog in this fight than just defending home or hearth. You defended that Constitution, that Declaration, that beautiful flapping flag.

I do know you wavered. I've read your private letters, and for that I apologize. Hopefully you won't mind the prying eyes of a nephew descending glancing at your words. I know you thought about desertion in 1862.

I respect you all the more for that. Fear is natural. It's the right reaction to war. I'd be more worried if you weren't fearful, weren't scared, didn't have trepidations.

The flag I put on your monument on Memorial Day is gone, someone plucked it from its perch here. Memorial Day is the day we've set aside to honor you and all the other sainted dead who have died defending our nation.

I forgot to get a new one at the store, so I visit flag-less today. I hope you don't mind. I'm here. I hope that's enough. It's beginning to rain, big salty drops on the screen of my phone and I don't think they're coming from the clouds, but they're making it very hard to type.

So I will close for now, thanking you for everything you gave that this nation might live.

Your nephew,  
John

