

## GETTYSBURG EXPERIENCE

*Peter L. Tompkins*

When Xander Tompkins was five years old, he became intrigued with the Civil War prints located in the den at his grandparents' home. Xander understood the complexity of the battle at Little Round Top and could relate to visiting guests details about the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine and the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama.

By 2016, Xander expressed the desire to attend the JLC Civil War Round Table. His first introduction to the CWRT was meeting "General A. P. Hill." Since his first meeting, it has been Grandpa, Dad and Xander Tompkins regularly attending the monthly programs.

Three generations of visiting the Gettysburg battlefield began when Grandfather Peter Tompkins was taken there by his parents in the early 1950's. Fast forward to 1986 when son Nathan, age eleven, experienced the battlegrounds for the first time. Two years later, our family returned to Gettysburg to witness the 125<sup>th</sup> re-enactment.

This past August 2019, Grandson Xander, age twelve, traveled with the extended family to tour and experience Gettysburg for the first time. Our trip began at the Gettysburg National Military Park Museum and Visitor Center where we saw a film about the Civil War and visited the cyclorama and museum.



*JLC CWRT members (left to right) Peter Tompkins, Xander Tompkins and Nathan Tompkins at the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Infantry monument on Little Round Top, Gettysburg National Military Park. (Photo provided by author.)*

Upon leaving the visitor center, we took a bus to the Spangler farm Civil War field hospital. Visitors were educated about medicine and civilian life during the battle and the struggles of the wounded. The farm became the field hospital for 1800 Union and 100 Confederate soldiers. The barn, along with other farm buildings, was filled to capacity with wounded patients.



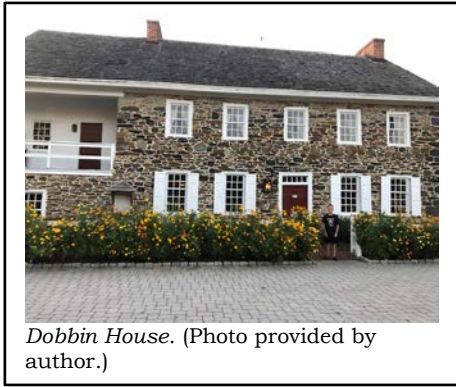
*Spangler Farm. (Photo provided by author.)*

On site at the farm was an interpreter, dressed in period attire. He was a descendent of a military Civil War surgeon and had on display his ancestor's actual surgeon's implements. On a table before him was a wounded Union "casualty" with an amputated foot and a bullet wound to his upper left chest. The "doctor" demonstrated how difficult it was to remove the bullet from the soldier.



*Surgical kit. (Photo provided by author.)*

The next adventure included a tour of the General and Mrs. Dwight D. Eisenhower farm. As a general, he led the Allies to victory in World War II. As president, he led the country through the Cold War years.



Dobbin House. (Photo provided by author.)

Capping off an eventful day was dinner at the historic 1776 Dobbin House & Tavern. The Dobbin House was a “station” that was part of the Underground Railroad. Located under one of the eaves were moveable shelves that concealed hidden quarters for runaway slaves. The small, cramped space had a slanted roof, making it impossible to stand up. There was no outside light or ventilation. Two “runaway slaves” were shown, lying down with a small lantern providing some illumination.

On our second day, we toured the Jenny Wade house. She was the only civilian killed during the fighting at Gettysburg. Jenny was at her sister’s home attending to her sister who had just given birth. While making bread for the Union soldiers, Jenny was killed by a stray bullet which passed through two wooden doors and struck her in the heart. Detailed descriptions of the three-day battle were recorded by Jenny’s sister, Georgia McClellan. An interesting fact that we learned is that the flag at Jenny Wade’s burial site is one of two for women that are lit both day and night. The other individual is Betsy Ross.

Our next adventure found us on the rooftop of a double-decker bus touring the battlefield. The one stop it made during the tour was at Little Round Top. After the tour, we revisited the park on our own and took in Little Round Top, Devil’s Den, and climbed to the top of the large Pennsylvania Monument.

That evening, we ate at the Blue and Gray Bar and Grill. Their specialty was battlefield burgers. Depending on which burger you selected, Union or Confederate, all burgers were named after generals on both sides. When the burgers were delivered to our table, each burger was topped by either an American or a Confederate flag.

Our last morning was spent visiting special battlefield sights, one of which was the Eternal Flame Monument. How fitting that it was constructed out of Alabama limestone and Maine granite!



Eternal Flame Monument. (Photo provided by author.)



Izzy Tompkins at the 11<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Monument. (Photo provided by author.)

We ended our time on the battlefield at the 11<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry monument. It featured

Sallie the dog, who marched with the unit from battle to battle. A recently published children’s book, *The Eternal Soldier*, told the true story of how Sallie became a Civil War hero. The book was given to Xander’s sister Izzy as a special memento of her trip with her loved ones.

Upon leaving Pennsylvania for New England and eventually home, we recalled what took place in the small town of Gettysburg July 1, 2, 3, 1863. We all left with a greater appreciation of the cost of human lives in order to preserve the Union and to provide freedom for all individuals.