PITTSBURGH, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 31, 1875

THE LITTLE BROKEN RING

A REMINISCENCE OF THE REBELLION

How a Union Soldier from Pittsburgh, After a Lapse of Thirteen Years, Was the Means of Restoring to the Family of a Young Confederate Soldier a Memento of His Death at the Battle of Antietam.

On the morning after the battle of Antietam, on the 18th of September, 1862, the troops still occupying the same position as of the evening previous (the battle having terminated about dark), the old Thirteenth Pennsylvania regiment of Pittsburgh, afterward the One-hundred-and-second, occupied the front line opposite the little brickchurch, one of the hottest places on that bloody field. During the morning, a flag of truce being displayed, a party of officers of the One-hundred-and-second went out on the field to render assistance to any wounded that might be lying on the field, as well, perchance, to get a view, if possible, of the position of the enemy. They came across the dead body of a private confederate soldier. On account of his cleanly appearance they concluded to bury the body. They dug a hole with their swords. Previous to covering him, upon examination, they found a letter in female handwriting, which proved to be a letter from a mother to her son. In the letter the mother told her son not to unnecessarily expose himself to danger, but not to be a coward, and she wanted to see him home soon on a furlough. The address upon the letter was "Louis Merz, Co. D., West Point Gaurds, Georgia." Upon the person was found an old broken ring. The officers agreed that Adjutant Joe Browne, of the One hundred and second, (now General Joe Browne, of the Eighteenth Division, N. G. P.,) should keep the letter and ring, and should he ever hear anything of the relatives of the dead confederate, to let them know what had become of the body and return the ring.

The officers who were with Adjutant Browne at that time were all Pittsburghers, consisting of Captain Samuel L. Fullwood, of company M, One hundred and second; Major John W. Patterson, of the One hundred and second; Lieutenant James D. Dunham, of Company F, One hundred and Second and Lieutenant Louis Hager, of the Sixty-third Pennsylvania regiment. All these, with the exception of Captain Fullwood, are dead.

The ring became mislaid among General Browne's papers until about the 5th of last month, when looking through his commissions and old papers, the ring was found, but the letter was mislaid.

General Browne conceived the idea that he might yet be enabled to ferret out the relatives of the dead confederate soldier, to whom it would doubtless be a source of gratification to know what disposition had been made of the remains of young Merz. The general at once concluded to write to the executive officer of the state from which Merz hailed with the hope of getting some information of his relatives, and about seven weeks ago he addressed a note to Governor Brown, of Georgia, (who, by the way, is of the same name as the general), asking if he knew of any family by the name of Merz at the town of West Point, in that state. To this, over a month afterward, he received the following reply from Governor Brown:

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Atlanta, Ga., March 10, 1875.

Mr. Joseph Browne,
Pittsburgh, Pa.

My Dear Sir:-I received your letter of the 5th February some time since, and have delayed a reply until I would make inquiries in reference to the relatives of the young man, Louis Merz, to whom your letter relates. A few days since I wrote the railroad agent at West Pomt, Ga., and I have to-day received a letter, of which the enclosed is a copy, which comes from a brother of young Merz. As you see, your letter touches a tender chord in his heart, and I am very happy indeed to be instrumental in putting you and him in communication. I will thank you if you write to him to West Point, Ga., and send, in such a manner as he may direct, the piece of ring, which to him will be a very precious memento. It will be as well to send it direct to West Point, and indeed better than to send it to me. I thank you very kindly for the humane and gentlemanly course

you have pursued in this matter. It is another evidence of the disposition of our people to bury the bitterness growing out of the war and become cemented again as fellow-citizens and friends. I am glad to see this spirit growing, and shall cheerfully do all in my power to encourage it. I do not know what your rank was in the army, as your letter does not inform me, and I have addressed you without prefixing any title. Again thanking you, I am,

Very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
Joseph E. Brown.

The letter referred to in Gov. Brown's note above, from Merz's brother, is as follows:

West Point, Ga., March 10, 1875.

Mr. Joseph Browne,
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Dear Sir:-A letter of Gov. Jos. E. Brown to Mr. W. C. Lanin, of this place, enclosing a copy of a letter dated Feb. 5, 1875, from yourself, in regard to a little broken ring, found on the body of a confederate soldier, (Louis Merz, West Point Guards, Co. D, 4th Georgia Regt), was just handed to me. Allow me to inform you that the deceased was an only brother of mine, and that this was the only information we have ever received in regard to him. His comrades said he was killed, but had to leave the battlefield and did not know what afterward became of him.

He was a man simple and plain in his ways, but highly respected by all with whom he came in contact, and it seems that even after his death his outward appearance commanded that respect, so natural to all men of refinement, that they gave him a decent soldier's burial and took care of a little broken memento, to return to any of his friends.

War is a bitter calamity, yet with all its necessary accompanying circumstances we often behold the bright and better part of human kind. Such, my dear sir, was your and your companions kind act. The gentle appearance of my brother excited your sympathy. The great carnage was over and you performed a noble and holy duty, due from man to man.

The little ring you saved, I need not tell you, will be highly appreciated. I have written to Gov. Jos. E. Brown to please request you to send it either through him or direct to myself. If you do the latter, please send it for safety sake by express.

I have a sister living here, Mrs. Betty Heyman, besides an aged mother and a married sister in Europe. Louis was my only brother.

Was the place of his grave marked? Though I doubt whether it could be found after such a lapse of time.

In conclusion, sir, permit me to tender you my heartfelt thanks for the generous interest you have taken. It shows that a noble mind will ever strive to discharge the duties which devolve upon it in the course of life.

Making often a journey north, I will use the next opportunity to pass through your city, to thank you personally. By giving me street and number of your address you will greatly oblige,

Very respectfully yours,
Daniel Merz.

Upon receipt of the above letters General Browne carefully rolled up the

battlefield and did not know what afterward became of him.

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Very respectfully yours,

Daniel Merz.

Upon receipt of the above letters General Browne carefully rolled up the ring in a small package and sent it by Adams express to Mr. Merz at West Point, and sent a letter to Gov. Brown, informing him of the fact. To the latter, General Browne received the following reply two or three days ago, from the governor:

Atlanta, Ga., March 23, 1875.

Gen. Joseph Browne,
Pittsburgh, Pa.

My Dear Sir:-I have your kind letter of the 18th inst., which I will forward today to Mr. Merz, so that he may know you have forwarded the ring, if there should be any failure in the express. I know he feels sincerely obliged to you for your kindness in this matter, and I join him in thanking you for the interest you have taken in forwarding the memento to an afflicted family, which will afford them much pleasure.

Wishing you lond life and prosperity, I am very truly, etc., Jos. E. Brown.

The ring reached its destination safely, as will be seen by the following letter from the dead confederate's brother, which was received but yesterday:

West Point, Ga., March 25,

Gen. Joseph Browne,
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Dear Sir:-Your kind letters of the 17th and 18th, also little package containing the broken ring, found on the body of my brother and so carefully preserved by you, safely reached me. Permit me again to tender, in the name of our whole family, as well as myself, our gratitude for the noble-hearted attention you have paid to the remains of our departed loved one. Although it is impossible to discover the grave, it is con-

Among the excitement and joys of life we deem this of but slight account, but under the present circumstances what a boon.

Thank God, the war is over and I cheerfully reiterate your words, "the welfare of the whole country." The great trouble was that the people of the states did not know each other as they should have done. The prejudices both north and south are gradually dying away, and give way to a better and more ennobling feeling. The good people on either side of the Potomac are for peace and good government, and if it had not been for meddling politicians no doubt any feeling of ill-will would long since have disappeared. We have tasted the bitter fruits of war and I assure you that there is no people more desirous for peach than we are here.

In conclusion let me thank you for the photograph enclosed in your letter. It shall ever be looked upon as the portrait of a friend, whose personal acquaintance I hope to make at some future time.

The ring was recognized by my sister as the ring my brother wore. It was once engraved, but had nearly worn off and we could only trace the signs by aid of a microscope.

Adding a passing tribute of respect to the memory of the companion officers who assisted you in the burial, I add also my best wishes for yourself, and remain

Very truly yours,

Daniel Merz.

A newspaper published at West Point, called the State Line Press, (a former confederate journal) under date of March 20, published the letters of Gen. Browne making inquiries of the relatives of the dead confederate, and adds:

"The memory of Louis Merz is embalmed in the affections of our citizens. With the first call for troops to roll back the tide of Federal invasion, he buckled on his armor, forsook a lucrative business, and staked life and everything upon the success of our cause. He was a gentleman of cultivated intellect and noble impulses, and enjoyed the hearty esteem of a large circle of acquaintances."

"On the bloody field of Antietam, while our army was retreating, he fell under the fire of the enemy. No friendly hand was near to sooth the anguish of his last hours--no kindly ear bent over him to receive his dying message. It was known to his comrades that he was killed--that was all. Until the other day there were no further tidings."

Daniel Merz, the author of some of the above letters, is a prominent business man of the town in which he resides as a member of the firm of Heyman, Merz & Co.