

## Theo Sterner Christ, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Doctor

Theo Sterner Christ (1830-1910), a young Lewisburg doctor, kept a journal and sent letters to the *Lewisburg Chronicle* during his Civil War service in the Union Army. He signed up in October 1861 with the 45th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry.

The 45th Regiment, with men from Union, Juniata and Mifflin counties, traveled from Harrisburg to Washington DC. Theo reported to the War Department and noted in his journal that he had "the pleasure of shaking hands with President Lincoln," and saluted "the venerable General Winfield Scott." At the camps around Washington, Theo was immediately called upon to treat soldiers for various ailments.

Soon the 45th was sent to Fortress Monroe, then to Port Royal, South Carolina. Theo treated the soldiers for typhoid, pneumonia, measles, small pox, dysentery and diarrhea. Theo saw little action nor its consequences. He would write that he heard Col. Fraser of the 47th NY talk about Beaufort: "The description was interesting; it must have been a magnificent affair." This cavalier attitude toward war would change.

Theo's thoughts on Civil War issues were mixed. He was critical of the "slaveocracy," and the secession of the southern states. He was not quite an abolitionist, and did not accept the idea of African Americans serving in the Union Army.

From South Carolina, the 45th moved to northern Virginia and Maryland. Turner's Gap at South Mountain in September 1862 was the first real combat experience for the 45th and for Theo. He wrote, "The lane up the mountain was the roughest I ever traveled. The shells began to burst overhead....Our noble 45th fought with the skill and bravery of veteran soldiers. They stormed the battery and put the rebels to flight....We fought 2 ½ hours, everything in the shape of ammunition was entirely exhausted." Of his own work, he said, "I had my hands full as our brave boys were carried to me by the dozen....One place that I had been just a few minutes before, a shell struck and exploded and threw dirt over me 50 yards off."

The regiment saw 112 wounded and 24 men killed, including Theo's friend Lieut. Smith of Wellsboro. "When I looked down on his corpse, tears flowed freely from my eyes." He would recall the anniversary of this battle and write to Smith's widow for several years thereafter.

Theo and the 45th were at Antietam and Fredericksburg Virginia in late 1862; at Vicksburg and Jackson, Mississippi in summer 1863. Besides wounds, he treated soldiers for exhaustion and the effects of bad food and water. He was ill, himself, in Mississippi. In fall 1863, the 45th fought in Blue Springs and Knoxville, Tennessee.

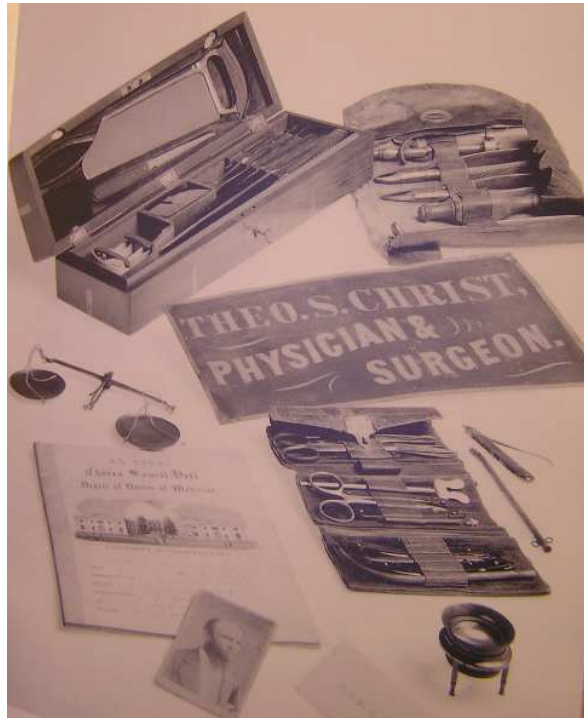
In January 1864, most of the men of the 45th regiment re-enlisted for "three more years or during the war" and received furloughs to go home. "I feel sorry to leave our troops. It seemed more like going from home, than towards home." Nevertheless, he spent his time in Lewisburg with friends.

In March, in Annapolis, Maryland, "The men [of the 45th] were enthusiastic...this looks like an early forward movement. Let it come, I am ready for any place, only I can serve my country."

Beginning in May 1864, the 45th was almost constantly in action in Virginia, until April 1865. During the course of the war, the regiment engaged in 41 battles.

Theo had entered service as an assistant surgeon, advanced to Surgeon of the Regiment in August 1862, to Brigade Surgeon in Oct 1862 and in 1864 to Surgeon-in-Chief of the 2nd Division, 9th Army Corps.

Theo Christ never returned to Lewisburg. He opened a medical practice in Chester, PA, and later in Lemont, Centre County. He married Sarah Irvin Thompson in 1871; they had four children, two living to adulthood. Theo Sterner Christ died in 1910.



Artifacts from Dr. Christ