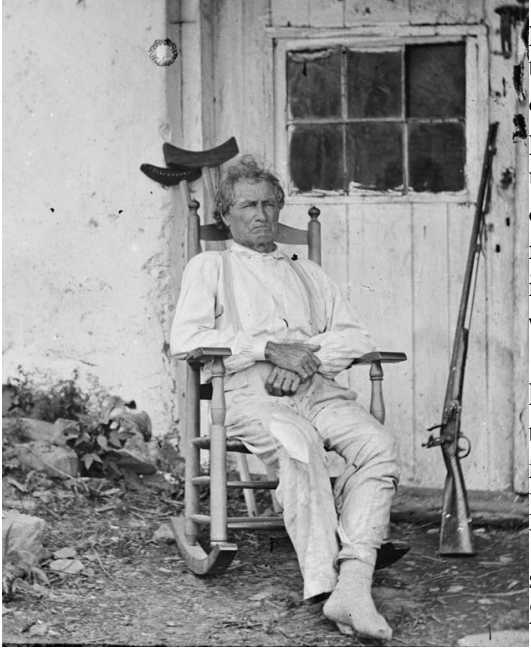


Portrait of an American Rifleman:

John L. Burns

When John Burns took to the battlefield at Gettysburg in 1863, he did so in the same spirit as many of the opposing Confederates on the field of battle, in defense of liberty and home. No, John Burns was not a soldier of the Union Army, he was a Pennsylvania farmer whose home, community, and life were under threat of an invading army. Like our forefathers of the American Revolution, who took up arms to defend the same at Lexington and Concord, Mr. Burns, a 72 year old farmer, took up arms to defend his life, family, property, and community. Now John Burns was no stranger to serving his country or community. A veteran of the War of 1812 and the War with Mexico, a constable for the town of Gettysburg, and a local farmer, Mr. Burns fit the image of the traditional American Rifleman, a true citizen soldier.



As constable of the town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania (a position perhaps similar to a modern day sheriff), John Burns attempted to oppose the Confederate forces invading the town of Gettysburg by raising a party of volunteers. It has been said he “adamantly asserted his civil authority” in protecting the town. Overwhelming numbers of Confederate soldiers, under the command of General Jubal Early, arrested John Burns for his opposition. After destroying a bridge, rail and telegraph lines, Early's men moved on, leaving the town of Gettysburg and freeing John Burns. Burns immediately set to arresting Confederate stragglers until several days later when the Federal Cavalry arrived.

On the first day of fighting at the Battle of Gettysburg, John Burns left his home on foot with a musket and powder horn, dressed in dark trousers and a blue “swallow-tail” coat, and walked until he reached the fighting near McPherson's Farm. Along the way, Mr. Burns borrowed an Enfield rifle and cartridges from a wounded Union soldier. A skeptical Union major sent Burns in to the nearby woods, where he might find shelter from the heat and enemy fire. Burns there attached himself to the 24th Michigan Infantry as a sharpshooter and is reported to have served gallantly with the “Iron Brigade,” including shooting a charging Confederate officer from his horse. Another report states that a Union colonel, impressed with Burns' skillful shooting, sent the old man a favorite long range rifle. Burns is reported to have said he was certain of killing at least three of the rebels and years later he is reported to have remarked he would like “one more good chance to give them a rip.” But for the Battle of Gettysburg, Mr. Burns was finished. He had been wounded in the arm, leg, and breast and managed a precarious escape home after the Union forces began to retreat their position.

John Burns fully recovered from his wounds and President Lincoln, when in Gettysburg delivering his famous address, met with Burns. John Burns is believed to be the only civilian who took up arms at Gettysburg. Burns briefly became a national hero and was immortalized in poetry by Bret Harte: *Brief is the glory that hero earns. . . John Burns--a practical man--Shouldered his rifle, unbent his brows, And then went back to his bees and cows.* Though you might not have heard of this American Rifleman in history class, a statue of him stands in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, honoring his service to his community and as a calling to future generations to honor the tradition of their riflemen forefathers.



- Would you like to carry on the tradition of the American Rifleman?
- Would you like to be able to make shots out to 500 yards with an ordinary rifle?
- Would you like to learn more about the history upon which our nation was founded and what has kept us strong for all these years?

Attend an “Appleseed.” The Appleseed Project is a program of the Revolutionary War Veterans Association, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the tradition of the American Rifleman and his history. All you need to come out for an Appleseed near you is a good attitude and a rifle (if you have one). You'll receive top notch shooting instruction and hear an exciting story about how America began.

Go to www.appleseedinfo.org for more information.