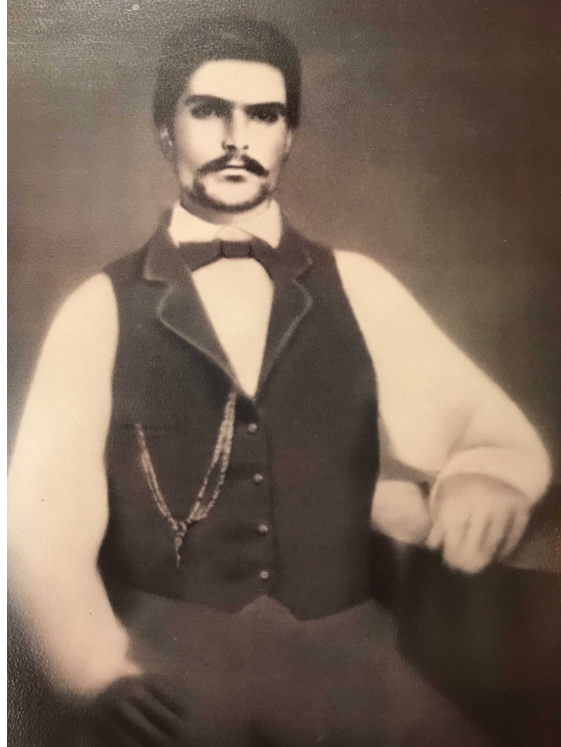


Conrad and Frank Wagner During the Civil War

A Family Historical Narrative



Conrad Wagner after returning from the Civil War.

The story of Conrad and Frank Wagner is not simply the story of two soldiers in the American Civil War. It is also an immigrant story, a family story, and a story of endurance. Their journey stretched from villages near the borderlands of France and Germany to the battlefields of the American South. They traveled thousands of miles through swamps, mountains, rivers, and war-torn cities, surviving some of the most important campaigns of the Civil War. Against extraordinary odds, both brothers survived three years of combat and returned home after witnessing the end of one of the defining events in American history.

Conrad Wagner was born in 1844, and his brother Frank grew up in a family whose roots lay in the region between Alsace and Baden. Their father Nicholas Wagner eventually brought the family to America. Records suggest that Conrad arrived in the United States in 1855 aboard the ship *Admiral* and eventually settled with his family in Franklin County, Indiana. There, the family farmed and built a new life.

Only a few years later America descended into civil war. On August 18, 1862, Conrad and Frank enlisted together in Company K of the 83rd Indiana Infantry Regiment. They entered

the war as immigrant farm boys and became part of General William Tecumseh Sherman's army. Over the next three years they marched approximately 6,700 miles by foot, rail, and river transport.

Their first campaigns brought them into the struggle for Vicksburg and control of the Mississippi River. The brothers traveled through Memphis and into the Mississippi Delta where they encountered some of the worst conditions of the war. Endless swamps, disease, mud, heat, and mosquitoes often proved as dangerous as bullets.

The Yazoo Pass Expedition illustrated these hardships. Grant hoped to bypass Confederate defenses through flooded waterways and hidden channels. The movement proved painfully slow. Dense forests blocked progress and Confederate fortifications eventually stopped the expedition. What looked brilliant on paper became exhausting reality.

The family letters written by Frank and Conrad reveal the personal side of the war. Originally written in German and later translated, they describe gunboats firing with thunderous noise, bullets passing overhead, poor food, sickness, and uncertainty over pay. Yet they repeatedly reassured their parents that they remained healthy and hopeful.

Eventually Union forces tightened around Vicksburg. The siege ended on July 4, 1863 with Confederate surrender. Together with Gettysburg, many historians consider this moment the turning point of the war. The Confederacy had effectively been divided.

After Vicksburg came Chattanooga and eventually Georgia. Conrad and Frank fought in the campaigns around Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge before joining Sherman's advance toward Atlanta.

The Atlanta Campaign of 1864 brought some of the hardest fighting of the war. Sherman repeatedly maneuvered around Confederate defenses while Johnston and later Hood attempted to stop the Union advance. Conrad and Frank moved through Resaca, Dallas, New Hope Church, Kennesaw Mountain, Atlanta, Jonesboro, and Lovejoy Station.

The fall of Atlanta had enormous military and political consequences and helped ensure Lincoln's reelection. Sherman then began his famous March to the Sea, moving through Georgia and eventually into the Carolinas as Confederate resistance collapsed.

In spring 1865 Confederate resistance finally ended. Conrad and Frank marched with thousands of Union soldiers in the Grand Review of the Armies in Washington D.C. Three years earlier they had left Indiana as young immigrant farm boys. Now they returned as veterans who had participated in some of the most important events of the war.

The regiment that began with approximately 980 men returned with only 372. Disease, wounds, and battle had taken a devastating toll.

Conrad returned to Indiana and married Helena Rippberger in 1867. A daughter, Mary Wagner, was born in 1869, but Conrad died only a year later at age twenty-six.

Perhaps the most remarkable part of the story is not the battles themselves. Two immigrant brothers crossed an ocean, survived one of history's bloodiest wars, and built a future for generations they would never meet.

Their descendants exist because Conrad and Frank kept going.