

**A FINE AND RARE PENNSYLVANIA FIRST DEFENDER 1861 MEDAL TO A 15 YEAR OLD PRIVATE IN THE ALLEN INFANTRY WHO DESERTED AFTER SERVING WITH THE 128TH PENNSYLVANIA INFANTRY AT THE BATTLE OF ANTIETAM WHERE HIS REGIMENT LOST ITS COLONEL AND MANY MEN DURING A CHARGE AT THE MEMORABLE 'CORNFIELD'. LATER JOINING THE 47TH PENNSYLVANIA INFANTRY, HE WAS WOUNDED AT THE BATTLE OF WINCHESTER IN SEPTEMBER 1864**



**PENNSYLVANIA FIRST DEFENDER 1861 MEDAL, ALLEN INFANTRY REVERSE, ENGRAVED 'CHAS. A. PFEIFFER'**

Pennsylvania 'First Defender' medals were authorised in 1891 and were awarded to the 476 officers and men of the five Pennsylvania units that answered the Presidents call in 1861. The medal was issued with five different reverses, one for each unit; the recipient's name being engraved above the embossed unit. As such these medals rare pieces, especially when complete with their ribbon bar. Captain Yeager who Commanded the Allen Infantry recorded that Pfeiffer was one of 49 men of the company that immediately volunteered for service on the Presidents call being made and marched with him to Washington, therefore being one of the first soldiers to reach Washington. Clearly other men joined over the next 2 months for when they mustered out on 27 July 1861, the companies strength was 78 and presumably all received the medal.

Charles A. Pfeiffer was born April 4, 1846 to Henry and Caroline Pfeiffer, of Allentown, Lehigh County, Pennsylvania and served with the Allen Guards/Infantry between 18 April and 26 July, 1861.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/25th\\_Pennsylvania\\_Infantry\\_Regiment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/25th_Pennsylvania_Infantry_Regiment)

He did not immediately re-enlist like many of his comrades; possibly as he had only just reached the age of 16; though he had claimed he was 18 when joining the Allen Infantry. However it appears in August 1862, he enlisted as a Sergeant in the newly formed 128th Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment and served with them at the Battle of Antietam 17 September 1862, a battle that would be the . The 128<sup>th</sup> were heavily engaged during the battle, in particular when charged at Millers Cornfield, losing their Colonel, who was killed, and suffered a further 117 casualties

<https://www.nps.gov/anti/learn/photosmultimedia/tour-stop-4.htm>

*"On September 6th, the regiment re-crossed the Potomac and entered into the Maryland Campaign. At Frederick City, where it arrived on the 14th, it was assigned to Crawford's Brigade, of Williams' Division, Mansfield's XII Corps.*

*Moving rapidly forward, the command arrived at South Mountain, where it was held in position during the night in expectation of a renewal of battle, which had been fiercely raging during the day, on the following morning. The enemy retired, and late on the 16th it arrived at Antietam Creek, the troops across the stream under Gen. Hooker having already opened the battle.*

*At eleven o'clock that evening, the regiment was led across the stream to support Hooker's troops. At two o'clock on the morning of the 17th, the regiment bivouacked in a ploughed field, in immediate proximity to the hostile lines. At early dawn the battle opened and the brigade was immediately advanced in close column of company.*



*At half-past six, in the morning, the regiment was entered into the fight, and made a most gallant charge through the EAST WOODS and into the memorable CORNFIELD, where the enemy lay concealed.*

*Unfortunately the charge was made by the flank, and before the regiment could be formed in line, the fire of the enemy had become very hot. While in the act of giving his orders, and bringing his command into position, Colonel Croasdale was killed instantly, and soon afterward Lt. Colonel Hammersly was severely wounded and borne from the field. Fresh from civilian life, hardly a month in service, with two of their commanding officers stricken down before their eyes, and comrades falling all around, the men fell into some confusion. This was soon corrected and the command held the ground where the struggle had been the most desperate, and where the regiment lost some of the bravest and best. It was finally relieved by order of Gen. Williams, now in command of the Corps after Gen. Joseph Mansfield was also mortally wounded.*

*The loss was beyond measure severe, being thirty-four killed, and eighty-five wounded, of which six subsequently died of their wounds. In addition to the Colonel, Captain William H. Andrews, under whose command the regiment was originally led to the field, and who had exhibited the most determined courage in the fight, was among the dead."*

It appears that during or immediately after the Battle of Antietam, Charles deserted, The Allentown Democrat of December 3, 1862, carried the following article:

*"ARRESTED - - Charles Pfeiffer, a deserter from Captain Huber's Company, 128th Regiment absent since the Battle of Antietam, was last week arrested and taken to Harrisburg, whence he will be forwarded to the regiment."*

and March 4, 1863

*"Arrested. Charles Pfeiffer and Willoughby Leopold of this borough were arrested at Bethlehem on Saturday evening last as deserters from the U.S. service and brought to this place and committed to jail. The first named belongs to the 128th regiment and latter to the 2nd cavalry. They will be taken on to Harrisburg and handed over to military authorities. They were arrested by Sgt. Keiper, recruiting officer here."*

Whether Charles was released without charge or this was two separate instances of being absent/deserting, is not known. Other sources suggest he served with the 128<sup>th</sup> until August 1863, so it may be two separate instances.

What is known is on 9 February 1864, he enlisted into Company 'B', 47<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment. Serving bravely throughout the rest of the war, he was wounded in action on 19 September 1864 at the battle of Winchester in Virginia. (also known as the Battle of Opequon):

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third\\_Battle\\_of\\_Winchester](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Battle_of_Winchester)

Recovering from his wounds, he was Honorably Discharged on 2 December 1865.

Charles Pfeiffer's service/pension record card shows only service with the 25<sup>th</sup> and 47<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment, so it seems his service with the 128<sup>th</sup> was either wiped (or he didn't mention it), so it didn't affect his pension. He is buried in the Union and West End Cemetery, Allentown, having died on 20 February 1890

## **THE ALLENTOWN INFANTRY MILITIA AND THE PENNSYLVANIAN FIRST DEFENDER MEDALS**

The Allentown Infantry Militia (Captain Yeager's Company) was one of the pre war militia companies that went to the defence of Washington in the outbreak of the Civil War. This small militia unit, like others from other States that were sent to defend Washington, became known as "First Defenders.". A

large proportion of these men went on to serve in Union Regiments as they were formed and due to their military experience, often gained far higher rank than they would have done in pre War service; indeed some rose from Privates to Colonels etc.

The following outstanding website gives much detail on the service of the Allen Guards as well as 47<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry Regiment. Charles Pfeiffer is mentioned numerous times:

<https://47thpennsylvaniavolunteers.com/related-units/allen-infantry-allen-guards/>

Pennsylvanian First Defender medals were issued to the veterans of the five Pennsylvanian militia units that answered the Presidents call to defend the capital. These consisted of the Washington National Light Infantry, Washington Artillerists, Ringgold Light Artillery, Logan Guards and the Allen Infantry, a total of 476 officers and men. These men were the first volunteer troops to reach Washington and be mustered into service, arriving at 6pm on 18 April 1861. These five militia units would soon after be consolidated into the then forming Twenty-fifth Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Regiment, being numbered companies A, B, C, D, and H.

Condition of this medal is excellent, complete with its original ribbon and top bar which is often missing from these medals. Sold with some copy research (digital) which includes the 1910 publication 'The First Defenders' which details each company, including musters and a 13 page article on the Allen Infantry from the 1911 Pennsylvania-German magazine

A fine and rare medal to a young soldier with a most interesting service