

## Isaac Wayne Van Leer

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(Transcription by Chad G. Nichols)

ISAAC WAYNE VAN LEER, son of Isaac W. Van Leer, Esq., long the public-spirited presiding officer of the Chester County Agricultural Society, and a grandnephew of the famous Gen. Wayne (known in Revolutionary times by the sobriquet of "Mad Anthony"), was born in the township of West Nantmeal, Chester Co., June 15, 1846. This extraordinary precocious and noble youth was a lineal descendant of Dr. Bernhard Van Leer, also inherited some of the Wayne blood of our ancient bailiwick, and we therefore need not be surprised to learn that in the days of a vile pro-slavery rebellion and national peril the generous, loyal, and high-spirited boy became a prompt and gallant soldier of the republic. In the autumn of 1861 Isaac left his home without his father's knowledge of the movement, and went to Harrisburg, where he offered to enlist; and subsequently attached himself to Company B, Capt. Potts, of the 53d Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers, in Sumner's division. Being apprehensive that his extreme youth might be objected to, he at first tried to pass himself off as a lad of eighteen, though only in his sixteenth year; and to prevent discovery of his whereabouts he resorted to the romantic expedient of temporarily assuming a fictitious name. His father, aware of the military proclivities of the youth, and anxious to get him home again, requested Capt. Potts (a relative of the family) to keep a lookout for Isaac. The captain endeavored to persuade him to return to his father's house, but he replied, "I *cannot* go home: I felt it to be my duty to go to the war." Finding him determined, the captain was then requested to take charge of the lad in case he persevered, and thus it was arranged to keep him in the company.

While they were at Camp Curtin Isaac was taken ill with typhoid fever. His accomplished and devoted sister went to Harrisburg, and nursed him until he was able to be removed, when she took him home with her to Philadelphia, and before he was able to carry his gun he insisted on returning to camp. He told his sister that he had repeatedly asked his father for permission to enter the service, but had always received a denial, and now he was determined to go. When his sister was about to part with him after nursing him through the fever, she said to him, as she passed her hand lovingly over his fair and smooth young brow, "Dear brother, fi the rebels should put a bullet through this pretty head how it would spoil it." He replied, "Not more than any other man's,—and somebody's must be spoiled."

At the battle of the Seven Pines, or Fair Oaks, Sumner's division was conspicuously engaged. The 53d Pennsylvania Volunteers were in the action all day. Capt. Eicholtz, who was then in command of Company B (in place of Capt. Potts, resigned on account of illness), says that in the midst of the fight some unauthorized person, in an adjacent regiment, gave the order to retreat. Company B, of the 53d Pennsylvania, being next them, also commenced falling back; but Capt. Eicholtz, perceiving that the order was a mistake, stepped out, and ordered his company to advance. Young Van Leer was one of the first to spring forward, and when the captain saw him, towards night, he says the youth was fighting with the utmost coolness and bravery, and above all others his voice could be heard ringing out, shrill and clear, "Steady boys! Steady!" while working like a veteran.

Isaac was first severely wounded in the ankle, and fell, being unable to stand. When his company at length fell back he lay midway between his regiment and the enemy, wondering, as he stated, into whose hands he should fall. After loading and firing a number of times while prostrate on the ground, he received a shot in the head, and then lay unconscious, with the battle raging over him. Somehow he was also badly wounded in the side and arm by a bayonet-thrust, which he could never account for. He lay nearly two days on the battle-field before his comrades had an opportunity to remove him, and all that time without any nourishment except water. The muscles of his face became so paralyzed that he was unable to open his mouth. Capt. Eicholtz, although his own right hand was much shattered, paid every possible attention to his young friend, who was afterwards taken to Fortress Monroe, where he was nine days before the ball was extracted. Isaac was next taken to New York, whither his indefatigable sister went, and faithfully nursed him until he sank under the wounds he had received, which sad event occurred on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June, 1862, when he had just completed his sixteenth year.

As an evidence of the unfaltering spirit with which this juvenile patriot engaged in the cause of his country, it may be mentioned that when near his end his sister inquired if he regretted the part he had taken in the eventful struggle. He responded, "Not for a moment! In such a cause, he would do just the same thing again. Otherwise," added he, "what would become of our country?"