Carl Johan Samuelsson

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Located in a rural farming area in the state of Illinois in America, is a quiet well kept cemetery named simply Western Cemetery. It is located just to the west of a small farming village known as Swedona. Swedona was originally named Berlin when it was created in 1836, but in 1869 the name was changed. Not until the 1850’s and 1860’s did the Swedish immigrants come to the area.

The Western Cemetery, also known as Swedona Cemetery, is the final resting place of 446 persons. Among the grave markers is an imposing granite memorial dedicated to the twenty-four men from the area who gave their lives in the American Civil War. One of those names is Charles Samuelson a member of C Company, 43rd Infantry Regiment.

Charles Samuelson was born Carl Johan Samuelsson in Systertorp, Kristdala, Kalmar län, Småland. Carl Johan was the twin brother of Sven Magnus Samuelsson both having been born on 6 July 1825. Their mother, Caisa Lisa Svensdotter, was the great granddaughter of Marta Carlsdotter Sabelskjold, one of the six noble daughters of Carl Jonsson Sabelskjold and Elisabeth Duraeus Sabelskjold.

In 1857 Carl Johan and his older brother, Olof, left Sweden and together made their way to Hamburg, Germany where they set sail to Quebec, Canada. The immigration record shows they arrived in America in 1857 and shortly afterward were farming in Andover, Henry County, Illinois as were many other Swedish immigrants.

It was while in Andover that Carl Johan met another Swedish immigrant, Anna Caren Roos (Americanized to Anna Catherine Rose) who had arrived at about the same time. Carl Johan is described as having blue eyes, brown hair, fair complexion and standing 5 feet 6 inches tall. The couple were married on 1 May 1860 and made their new home on the farm in Andover. On 26 February 1861 their daughter, Christine, was born. This young family was now part of the American dream of self fulfillment.

The American Civil War (1861-1864) was a period of intense passions for both the Northern States (The Union) and the Southern States (The Confederacy). The Southern States wanted to maintain ownership of slaves while the Northern States felt slaves were human beings who deserved to be free. This fueled violence and ultimately the declaration of war between the two sides.

Caught up in that violence were the Swedes living in the state of Illinois which was a Northern State. Carl Johan had a young family, but like other patriotic Swedish immigrants, he felt it his duty to serve when called. He was drafted into the Union Army at Galesburg on 1 September 1861 on a Sunday afternoon after church. That was the last time that Carl Johan’s wife, Anna and their little baby, Christine, who was six months old, would see Carl Johan. In a letter to Anna dated 26 November 1861, Carl Johan relates that he is feeling much better since he had been given 2 blankets, underpants, shirt, and shoes so that he was not cold. On 16 December 1861 Carl Johan enlisted in Company C, 43rd Infantry Regiment. It consisted of 100 Swedes and 3 Germans.

Over the next three and a half months, the 43rd made its way from Illinois into the state of Tennessee. Along the way the men of Company C had become fair marksmen and could execute military maneuvers. They were ordered to Pittsburg Landing a short distance from Shiloh Church as part of the Third Brigade of General McClelland’s Division of the Army of Tennessee and were encamped there for about three weeks.

On Saturday afternoon, April 5th, the 43rd Regiment was ordered to hold itself in readiness for inspection and review on Sunday morning at sunrise. As the men were awaiting orders on that Sunday morning to form ranks,
volleys of musket fire were suddenly heard in front. The drummer beat the long roll of alarm. Seizing their guns and accoutrements, the men of the 43rd formed ranks in company quarters, marched to the parade ground in front of the camp and formed in line of battle. The 43rd was one of the few regiments ready for action on that fatal morning. They hardly had time to deploy before the enemy appeared, marching in regimental divisions in such masses as to cover the ground over which the Union soldiers had a clear view, and so close upon them that the skirmish line was pressed back on the regiment. Lieut. Col. Engelman then ordered the second battalion, five companies, including Company C, of his regiment to take the position. The battalion, about 300 strong, moved into position and held it about ten minutes against a tenfold force of the enemy, then fell back to the first battalion, leaving many dead and wounded behind on the battlefield. On that Sunday morning at sunrise, Carl Johan was killed instantly.

The Battle of Shiloh and nearby locations saw nearly 4,000 men killed. Their bodies, both Union and Confederate, were buried in trenches and it wasn’t until 1866 that the Federal government exhumed the bodies of the Union soldiers and reburied them at the national cemetery. There are 2,359 Union soldiers whose remains are unknown and Carl Johan is one of those. The Confederate soldiers were left in the trenches since the Federal government did not recognize them as American servicemen at that time and they remain there to this day.

The Battle of Shiloh is considered one of the most important battles in American history and Carl Johan Samuelsson participated in it. Although he died at the very beginning, he represented his heritage honorably.

After Carl Johan died, Anna was left a widow at the age of 35 with a 14 month old daughter. Anna applied for a widows’ pension for herself and Christine. It was a meager pension, but enough to provide for them. Anna never remarried and dedicated her life to raising her daughter.

On 17 November 1877 at the age of sixteen, Christine married Claus Alfred Fehr who had emigrated from Jonkopings lan, Sweden in 1867. They had twelve children of which nine lived until adulthood. One of their daughters, Mildred Emilia, was my grandmother and Mildred Emelia’s son, George Vanderhoof, was my father.

Civil War Memorial-Western Cemetery, Swedona, Illinois
Charles Samuelson (Carl Johan Samuelsson) is the bottom name.
Shiloh National Cemetery where Carl Johan’s unidentified remains are buried.

Christine and her husband, Claus Alfred Fehr with their two oldest children, Jennings and Nora. Claus Alfred and Christine married when she was sixteen.

Christine (center) standing with her six daughters at the farm in Swedona, Illinois. Mildred Emelia (far left) was my grandmother.
Samuelson, Charles, 37, married, farmer, Andover, IL. He had blue eyes, brown hair, fair complexion and was 5' 6" in height. Born in Sweden. Joined for three years' service 1 Sept. 1861 in Galesburg. Mustered into service as a private 16 Dec. 1861 in Ottewill, M.O. Killed in action at the Battle of Shiloh, TN 6 April 1862.

He came from Kristala Parish (Kalm.) where he was born 11 April 1825. He arrived in the

The Galesburg Light Guards

U.S. 1857 together with his family. - Hemlandet, 9 Oct. 1861; ALCR, book 1, p. 36.