



JOHN LINCOLN CLEM



As Portrayed by Greg Decker

John Lincoln Clem (1851-1937) was a young man who served as a drummer boy in the Union Army during the American Civil War. He gained fame for his bravery at the tender age of 12. Clem later became the youngest noncommissioned officer in

Army history.

Clem was born in Newark, Ohio and ran away from home at age 9 to become a drummer boy for the Union army. He tried to join the 3rd Ohio Infantry but was rejected because of his age and small stature.

He attempted to join the 22nd Michigan and was only considered a mascot and drummer boy until he was 11.

During the battle of Chickamauga, Clem rode an artillery caisson to the front, and while wielding a musket custom made for his size, Clem shot a Confederate colonel that demanded his surrender. After

the battle, this “Drummer Boy of Chickamauga” was promoted to sergeant; the youngest in history. In October 1863, Clem was captured in Georgia by Confederate cavalry while he was a train guard. The

“Rebs” took his uniform away and that greatly upset Clem, especially because his hat had three bullet holes in it. The Confederates used his age as propaganda in that they told their newspaper readers that the Yankees were so desperate that they resorted to sending babies to fight them. Clem was discharged by the Army in 1864 after being wounded twice in combat.

Clem spent many years in the Army. He died in 1937 and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.



Greg Decker portrays John Lincoln Clem. Greg is a student at Hollidaysburg Catholic School.