



2ND MINNESOTA BATTERY OF LIGHT ARTILLERY

Louis Franklin Benge

Louis was a transfer man to the Second Battery, serving with the artillery for a few months in 1863. The unit Louis enlisted in was Company B of the 21st Illinois Infantry. He was a 26 year old farmer when he signed up on June 28, 1861, agreeing to serve for three years.

Louis did not leave many clues about his reason for enlisting, but the fact that he was born in Roccassel, Kentucky, and listed his home in 1861 as Ooltewah, Tennessee, leads to speculation that he may not have agreed with Southern secession. His enlistment was credited to Peary, Cumberland County, Illinois. He had black eyes, light hair, a dark complexion, and stood 5' 10" tall.

Louis went South with his regiment, described as a, "hale hearty young man", but that was soon to change. While in Mississippi that fall, Louis caught the measles. He was not alone as many in the 21st Illinois were sick with the measles that fall. Louis "never seemed to be as stout and hearty as before", said one of Louis' commanding officers.

In November and December of 1861, Louis was detailed as a nurse at the Brigade Hospital where he continued to serve until February of 1862. Louis went back to his company and served with the infantry until in March of 1863 when he was detailed to serve in the Second Minnesota Battery of Artillery. He remained there until he was sent back to his infantry unit in October of 1863 and was immediately detailed again to guard the "company goods."

That spring, Louis and others in his company were given a veteran's furlough for agreeing to reenlist for another three years or the duration of the War. When he came back to the Infantry, Louis was attached to the Division Head Quarters as an orderly where he served until the war was over and he was discharged.

The discharge came on December 16, 1865. Louis was in San Antonio, Texas, when he was discharged. His muster out sheet noted that he left the Army with "a view to payment without returning to Illinois" and that he owed the sutler \$7.10.

Eventually, Louis must have made it back to Illinois as further records place him living in Neoga, Illinois. Later records show his home to be Morgan County, Indiana.

At some point, Louis changed the spelling of his name to "Bange" rather than "Benge" and at various times went by his middle name of Franklin rather than Louis.

Louis was married three times. Little is known about the first marriage except that her name was Jane and she died in childbirth. The child died also. Louis was remarried a year or so later to Debra, but she died in the fall of 1860. Louis was married a third time to Elmeeter

(the correct spelling of her name is elusive) on May 1, 1864. The date places the marriage while Louis was on his veteran's furlough. The couple's first child was born in 1867, followed by three more in the next years. All four of the children were born in Indiana.

It was Elmeeter who applied for a widow's pension after Louis' death on April 9, 1876, while they were living in Indiana. Her application was not a smooth process. One deposition stated she had asked a friend to swear he had seen Louis cough up clots of blood and that Louis was unable to do even a half a day's work, but the friend refused. He claimed Louis had said many times how good his health was, how he had never felt better in his life as he did in the years after the war. The friend also described the scars Louis had shown him. Louis said a pair of horses had run away and the wagon ran over Louis' chest, the "tire" prints easily seen on Louis' chest. Still, the friend insisted Louis could always work at cutting wood, shucking corn, or whatever up until two weeks before his death. The friend blamed exposure for Louis' death, describing how Louis slept in an old shanty where Louis caught a "cold which resulted in lung fever" and caused his death.

The friend repeated that he could not swear to a lie, especially "to help any body cheat his government out of a pension"--the underlining was done by the friend.

Why the friend provided such a deposition is unknown since an official investigation of Louis' health turned up a physician's statement that Louis had become disabled during his time in the Army. The disability was noted as having been caused by "measles, resulting in disease of the lungs, at Helena, Ark", though the date stated on this form was 1862. Whether or not Elmeeter got any pension help was not recorded.

Louis was buried in the Foster Cemetery in Morgan County, Indiana, and is surrounded by family members. His grave was not marked until 2008 when a veteran's stone was set for him by members of the Second Minnesota Battery reenactors.



Researched and compiled by the reenactors of the 2nd Minnesota Battery of Light Artillery. Visit our website at <http://www.2mnbattery.org> for more information about our soldiers and our organization.

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