



2ND MINNESOTA BATTERY OF LIGHT ARTILLERY

David William Coulthard

David's parents were Scottish immigrants to Canada where David was born about 1838. Various records give conflicting years for his birth. By 1862, David had moved from Canada to Minnesota and was working as a saddler in St. Cloud, Stearns County, when he chose to enlist in the Second Battery of Light Artillery. He signed his enlistment papers on August 13 when the Battery had officers in the state recruiting as the unit was already serving in the south.

David said he was 24 years old, had blue eyes, light hair and a fair complexion. He stood 5' 9-3/4" tall and was paid a \$25 bounty at his enlistment.

The duties to which David was assigned fitted his prewar occupation when he reached the Battery at the end of September. He was made an artificer, a person in charge of the military hardware the Battery needed to function.

Civil War camps were not always good places for young men who had never been exposed to the diseases fostered by crowded human conditions and David fell victim to poor health shortly after the battle at Perryville, Kentucky. He was sent to the hospital in Nashville on November 13 and remained there five months, his discharge from the hospital coming on April 19, 1863. David believed that exposure to the weather while on the Perryville campaign caused him to contract typhoid fever.

When he was finally well enough to return, David's duties were changed to make him the saddler for the Battery, again, a job suited to his prewar occupation, but it was not a long assignment. David was soon sent on detached service at Stevenson, Alabama, where he remained until December.

By March of 1864, many of the men who had enlisted in the Battery as it was forming up were eligible to reenlist and get a 30 day veterans furlough. Having not enlisted until August, David was not yet eligible, so he was sent to serve with the other Battery men not reenlisting on the guns of the Battery I, Second Illinois Light Artillery. David was with them when they fought some of the difficult battles on the march to Atlanta, Georgia.

When the men sent to the Illinois Battery went back to their own Minnesota Battery on October 16, 1864, David was with them, but their fighting was limited during the rest of the war. The Second Battery was assigned to garrison duty in Tennessee and saw little hard fighting with the Confederates during the last year of the war.

Trees, however, were an enemy upon which the Union Army continued to mount assaults. Many men of the Battery were detailed to cut logs for the garrison. David was assigned to this duty from December of 1864 to April of 1865.

By June of 1865, the war had ended and the men were being sent home. Troops were arranged and rearranged as this mustering out began and the Second Battery was given orders to move by freight train from Philadelphia, Tennessee, to Knoxville, Tennessee. Men filled the cars and many were sitting on the roofs as they traveled. Some of the Second Battery men chose to ride on the roofs and their ideas conflict as to where was a better place to be when the cars began jumping the tracks and rolling down an embankment.

David was on top and he decided jumping was a better plan than riding the car down. He said the jump was a little over 20 feet, but since the train was moving, it magnified the impact and he was thrown against some timbers laying there. The shins of both legs were badly scraped, the right leg being scraped to the bone from ankle to knee. David was treated as best as he could be by the men around him as there was no surgeon on the train.

Other men in the Battery who described the wreck said the jump David and others made was anywhere from 15 to 50 feet, but all note the steep embankment and timbers piled along it. The car David was riding on did not go fully over the embankment, instead it hung by the coupling.

The injuries did not prevent David and the men of the Battery from going back to Fort Snelling to be mustered out of the Army on August 16, 1865. David served three years and three days.

David remained in Minnesota and married Mary C. Kuntsman on January 10, 1871, in Shakopee. The 1880 census listed them living in Loreno in Brown County. Now they had a daughter named Mary and a son named Walter. David's brother-in-law was also living with them. David was working as a mail agent.

In 1891, David filed for an invalid's pension. He cited the continuing trouble he was having with his legs and hips as the primary cause for his application, but he noted deafness and rheumatism as well. The pension was approved, but for disease of the kidneys. By then, the family had moved again; they were then living in Fairmont in Martin County.

David's health was failing and on December 4, 1894, he breathed his last. His obituary noted he had struggled with his health for years, but it had seemed as if things were getting better until "that dreaded disease pneumonia attacked him and marked him for its victim."

The newspaper cited David as a “bright, intelligent, generous-hearted citizen, kind and affectionate in his family and liberal in all the impulses of heart and brain.”

The funeral was conducted through the Episcopal Church in Fairmont and the Masonic Lodge provided their honors at the graveside in Lakeview Cemetery in Fairmont.



A white marble veteran's marker was placed on David's grave, but at some point, the marker was laid flat rather than standing upright as was intended. Grass, leaves and dirt eventually covered the stone as it lay and it began to sink until it was completely hidden. Cemetery records were vague and only a reference to the Coulthards buying a plot in section 59 could be found, and even then the name was spelled quite differently.



Church records provided proof that David was buried in Lakeview and a careful inspection of the area finally turned up a tiny glimpse of a stone with no engraving visible. When the sod was cut off and the mud scraped away, the lettering proved that it was David's stone. Members of the reenacting Battery saw to it that arrangements were made to have the stone reset in the upright position over David's final resting place.

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.

Updated: 22 April 2019