



## 2ND MINNESOTA BATTERY OF LIGHT ARTILLERY

### George D. Culbertson

If George would not have had children, the story of his life would be one immense tangle and almost nothing would be known. Even with the help of a detailed letter written by his son, Leon, George's life is not very clear.

For one reason, George served under two different names and in at least three units during the Civil War, not including the detailed time he spent with the Second Minnesota Battery. Somehow, easily understood with all the changes George managed to make, he was labeled a deserter with the army and as such, his widow was not eligible for a pension. Leon wrote a letter describing what he knew and what evidence he used to prove his father was not a deserter. He was not the most adept at using punctuation, capitalization, or proper spelling.

*"It (the widow's pension application) was turned down at Washington stating he was a deserter. I don't know whose fault it is but it is not true we have both of his discharges. here is the first one George D. Culbertson enlisted on the 17th day of April 1861 at Lincoln Ill and was mustered into Service of the U.S. as a Private in Company H, 7th Regiment Illinois Volunteer Infantry for a Period of three months, on the 25th day of April 1861, age 23 years. mustered out on July 25, 1861. Then he reenlisted in the Three years Service in this Service he Enlisted on the 16 day of August 1861 at Atlanta Illinois and was mustered into service of the United States as a sergeant in Company F, 38th Regiment Illinois Volunteer Infantry for the period of three years. on the 23 day of August 1861. age 23. Height 5 ft 10 1/2 in. Hair light Eyes Blue complexion Light Occupation Farmer Native Scott County Kentucky Discharged March 1 1862 he had a mishap falling from a Transport train and was badly hurt while under Captain Whitehurst after which Lung Trouble set in then he was discharged from service we have both discharges. he stayed home a while then he reinlisted again being afraid he could not get back under the name of George D. Culbertson he Inlisted under the name of George W. Willson which he served the balance of the war at the close of the war he was appointed Transporter of Horses at Washington D.C. and served about 6 weeks. we don't know whether he got a Discharge under the name of Geo. D. Willson or not but I don't think he did I think he was afraid for Inlisting under a consumed name. we have other papers besides his discharges."*

The letter went on asking for someone to look into the case as their mother badly needed the pension money and that the attorney had not been very helpful. Then it continued with more military information.

*"The name of George D. Willson appears on the roll Book of Ohio and Illinois. he was in the Libby Prison his Doctor whom attended him claims his death came from his wounds inflicted while in service in the war: Hoping to hear from you at an early date as possible. I remain yours. L.D. Culbertson, son of the Widdow Mary G Culbertson at Eturia St Station A East Liverpool, O. My Father George Culbertson had been drawn a pension for several years, at \$15.00 per month"*

Military records in the compiled 38th Illinois Infantry records do agree with what Leon wrote. George did serve twice. The first enlistment was for three months and at the expiration of that time, he enlisted again. He did serve as a sergeant and was discharged for disability. Nothing in the records indicate George was ever wounded or held in Libby Prison. Since this was in a postscript, perhaps it may have been added for effect?

Evidence is lacking to prove service under the name of George Willson was actually George Culbertson. The pension affidavit George himself filed refuted any claim that he and George Willson were the same man, insisting that it must be some clerical error that put him as the same man in the 110th Ohio. George even underlined the word "not" when he said he had "not rendered any such service" to the army.

The Pension Department accepted George's affidavit because a voucher authorizing payment to George at the rate of \$15 per month is included in his file. Still, Leon said he had the enlistment papers of George Willson to state the two were the same man. The lack of a discharge under the name of George Willson is probably what turned up when Mary applied for a widow's pension and it listed George as a deserter. Therefore, no pension. It may also be why George refused to admit he was the same man as the one listed as a deserter.

Whether or not Mary ever got the pension is unknown as the trail stops with Leon's letter.



More confusion results from George's death certificate. He died on July 12, 1912, from "neurasthenia." The details of his life do match what Leon wrote in his letter to the Pension Department, but the certificate lists George as a widower, meaning Mary should have preceded him in death. Cemetery records indicate Mary survived George, not joining him in the Riverview Cemetery in East Liverpool until 1918. They lie together in a family plot with two of their sons, Frank and Leon, and Leon's wife.

Nothing in any of George's tangled records indicate that he served with the Second Minnesota Battery, but the time of service listed in the Battery's morning reports would have been during the time George was serving as George Willson. That name does not appear on the Battery records, only that of George Culbertson serving as a detailed man from Company F, 38th Illinois Infantry. Did George make a mistake and provide his real name and unit when he reported in to the Battery on February 9, 1863? There were a number of other men detailed to the Battery from the 38th at this time, but George was the only one from Company F. The men from the 38th served 13 days with the Battery before returning to their own unit. Three of the men, including George, were detailed to the Battery again on June 23, 1863, and served there for four months. Two other new men from the 38th were also sent to the Battery in June of 1863, where they stayed three to four months, but again, George was the only man from Company F. Did that keep his secret? Or are there other reasons such as confusion in discharge dates to blame for George appearing to be in two units at the same time? There were men from the 101st Ohio Infantry also detailed to the Battery at this time.

Could it have been that unit George was actually from and he miswrote the number when he denied serving in it to the Pension Department in 1892?

Little is clear except for the final statement from the Veteran's Administration on George's tombstone. He has a military marker that ignores his confusing military service and uses the only clear record that exists for George D. Culbertson. His service as a three month man serving in Company A, 7th Illinois Infantry.

*Researched and compiled by the reenactors of the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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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