



2ND MINNESOTA BATTERY OF LIGHT ARTILLERY

James Furguson

The Civil War was less than a year old when 36-year-old James Furguson, a farmer living near Faribault in Rice County, Minnesota, decided to enlist. This may have been an easy choice as he probably had few ties to Faribault, having lived there less than two years. James chose to enlist in the Second Minnesota Battery of Light Artillery, a unit then forming at Fort Snelling. It was February 21st, 1862. James made his mark on his enlistment papers rather than signing his name. The letters of “a”, “i”, “u”, “e”, and “o” all appear to be interchangeable in his name on any given census, pension record, or military paper. James’ inability to write is probably why his name is spelled so many ways and it is unknown which is the correct way to spell Furguson. However spelled, the descriptive roll showed James to be 5’ 4” tall, with gray eyes, dark hair, and a light complexion. His birth place was Rutland, Vermont.

It is not known when James moved to Minnesota, but in 1860, he was living in a boarding house in Clear Lake in Sherburne County with his occupation noted as “laborer.”

When the Second Battery was up to full strength, the unit received orders south, traveling by riverboat to Missouri in May of 1862, where they were fitted out with guns, horses, and equipment.

James became ill that spring at the Battery’s camp in Clear Creek, Mississippi, and was sent to the hospital where he was treated for severe diarrhea. Not having a surgeon assigned to the Battery, James was under the care of the surgeon from the Fourth Minnesota Infantry. His health did not completely return, but James continued in the Army and was with the Battery when they went into battle at Stones River, near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, on December 30th, 1862.

The battle at Murfreesboro was fought over a three day period and cost the Battery dearly. Five men were wounded, two killed, and another mortally wounded. James was one of those wounded. A piece of an exploding shell hit him in the right shoulder. It caused him trouble for the rest of his life.

James was sent to the hospital for his wound and because the chronic diarrhea had returned. It, too, was something that continued to plague him for years.

As a result of his health, James was assigned to light duty. The commanding officer of the Battery, Captain William Hotchkiss, noted the duty James was assigned to as “taking care of spare horses” and “assistant at company hospital.” The Captain blamed chronic diarrhea for James’ trouble rather than the wound.

Despite the health issues, James did not leave the Army, in fact, he reenlisted when the Battery veteranized in March of 1864. This entitled him to a furlough home, one of the benefits of reenlisting. Where he went on his furlough is unknown, but in July, James was stuck in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where he wrote a letter asking for transportation to his unit. He explained he had been left behind when the Battery moved out through what he called “a misunderstanding.” He was also concerned because he had given his furlough papers to the person he addressed the letter to and that they had not returned them. James had someone else write the letter for him.

James did catch up to the Battery and continued to serve. He was sent on detached service for a while and returned to duty in December. In January, he was again sent on detached service to the Quartermaster Department where he served until March 28, 1865.

The war ended and the Second Battery was mustered out of the service on August 16th, 1865, at Fort Snelling. The men were civilians again.

The next record James left was when he married Mary Ann Phillips in March of 1867, in Delano, Minnesota. They did not remain there for a long time as by 1870, they had moved to Eden Prairie in Hennepin County. There was another person in their household named William Laulin and his occupation was that of farm laborer. He probably was working for the Fergusons. Their farm was near the Minnesota River and people using the ferry at Murphy’s Landing crossed through the Ferguson land. It was land mostly used for growing small vegetable crops.

The effects of the war on James’ health continued to take its toll and in January of 1876, James filed for an invalid pension. Testimony from several comrades, including Captain Hotchkiss, provided details of his service. Somewhere in the intervening years, James learned to write and filed his own pension, signing his name this time. His pension was awarded as the wound in his shoulder made it hard for James to earn a living on his farm in Eden Prairie. He didn’t collect his pension very long as James died on August 4, 1882. He was laid to rest in the Eden Prairie Cemetery.

Mary Ann applied for a widow’s pension. She claimed only herself as they had not had children. Her post office address was “Washburn”, but her home was in the town of Eden Prairie, Hennepin County, Minnesota.

Mary Ann died on April 7, 1888, and was laid to rest beside James. James and Mary Ann had markers on their graves at the time of their burial, but vandalism in the 1960’s broke MaryAnn’s marker and lost James’ marker. The pieces of MaryAnn’s broken stone were laid in place for her, but James’ grave went unmarked. When the lack of a marker for James was discovered in 2003 by the Civil War reenactment group who portrays the Second Minnesota Battery, they worked with the cemetery’s caretaker and the Veteran’s Administration to provide a new stone for James. The Cemetery Association found a donor willing to provide a new a stone for MaryAnn and the markers were dedicated on June 5, 2004.



The Furguson's had bought a plot of six to eight graves when they first bought a place in the Eden Prairie Cemetery. Only two of the graves had ever been used, so when a 22 year old Marine from Eden Prairie was killed in the fighting in Iraq on April 4, 2004, the cemetery offered one of the unused Furguson graves as a resting place of honor for the young Marine. USMC Corporal Tyler Fey was buried in the adjoining grave to James. The dedication for the new stones for the Fergusons was expanded to include honors for Corporal Fey and the ceremony received much press coverage in both newspapers and television.

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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