



2ND MINNESOTA BATTERY OF LIGHT ARTILLERY

James W. Johnson

James was without a doubt an honest man, answering every question put to him by the Pension Department with as much detail as he could. When the application form asked if he had any permanent marks or scars on his person, he wrote, "A mark from a scald on left Breast. tattoo--woman with Flag on left arm."

If the Pension Department had asked more questions, James might have told more of his story.

He was born on July 18, 1833, in Bucksport, Maine. By 1862, he was living in St. Cloud, Minnesota. He enlisted in the Second Minnesota Battery on March 10, 1862. He was 30 years old, stood 5' 9" tall, had blue eyes, dark hair and a light complexion. His occupation was that of laborer.

James joined the Battery as a wagoner, participating in the battles at Perryville and Stones River. By spring, James was sick and was sent to the hospital at Murfreesboro, Tennessee. For a short time that spring, between when he left the hospital and when he was sent to the Second Minnesota Battery, James served on the river steamer, *Newsboy*.

He was back with the Battery in time to be with them at the Battle of Chickamauga, but went to the hospital at Chattanooga, Tennessee, on November 4, 1863. James stayed in the hospital almost five months, returning to duty just in time to reenlist as a veteran volunteer on March 31, 1865.

He received a veteran's furlough and went back to Minnesota to spend his 30 day furlough. When the Battery formed up to return to the war, James was with them. He served until the Battery was mustered out in August of 1865.

New horizons must have called to James as he moved between Clearwater and St. Cloud several times until 1875 when he moved back east to Bucksport, Maine. He stayed there only two years before moving to the Black Hills of South Dakota in 1881. In 1883, he moved again, this time further west to Colorado where he stayed another two years. Montana was his next home and that lasted until 1885 when he moved to Sitka, Alaska. At last, James had found a place where he would stay for more than just a few years.

James applied for his pension in December of 1901, still living in Sitka. He only collected his pension for a year. James died on November 13, 1902. Somewhere along the way on his travels, James married a woman named Gertrude and she applied, not for a widow's pension, but for any remaining pay due James. The Pension Department did not make a notation in James' file if they sent Gertrude anything. It is not known why she did not apply for a pension.

No records have been found in Alaska to show where James was laid to rest. His last known address put him on an island along the south coast of Alaska in

Yakutat, an area accessible only by boat. *The Alaskan* Newspaper from Sitka carried a notice on November 15, 1902, "*Captain Johnson of Yakutat died of Thursday of dropsy He came down on the last Bertha to medical treatment.*" The *Bertha* referred to was a boat that ran on a regular schedule in the area.

Officials in Alaska suggested James may have been cremated since he died after the ground was frozen. This was a common custom in Alaska in 1902 and would leave no record of burial place. Where James rests may never be known.

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: 31 July 2020