



2ND MINNESOTA BATTERY OF LIGHT ARTILLERY

Alfred Townsend

When Alfred decided to enlist, an unusual companion accompanied him. His young wife, Sylvia, left their home in Rice County, Minnesota, and went with Alfred to Fort Snelling where he was mustered into the Second Battery on March 21, 1862. It was the day the Battery was formally accepted into the service of the U.S., making them "official." Sylvia made application to the commanding officer of the Battery, Captain Hotchkiss, and was appointed a laundress for the Battery on March 22.

The journey that brought Alfred and his wife to the Second Battery began with Alfred's birth in Champion, New York. He married Caroline Emily Phelps at Gouverneur, New York on March 11, 1840. Caroline died at Cicero, New York in 1850. Alfred moved west and on February 9, 1854, he married Sylvia L. Field at Lawrence, Michigan. They had known each other for about a year before they married. At the time of their wedding, Alfred was 35 years old and Sylvia was 17. By 1862, they were living near Dundas in Rice County, Minnesota, and Alfred was farming.

The Battery left Minnesota in May and soon after being equipped, they were sent to the field. While they were in camp in Mississippi, many men fell prey to illness and Sylvia wrote, "there was much sickness among the men" and some were not able to leave when the Battery was ordered to move. A detail of men were left behind to care for the sick men and Alfred was one of those detailed. Sylvia stayed with him and acted as a nurse. She said the makeshift hospital at Farmington, Mississippi, had as many as 3,000 men sick and only three women acting as nurses. The men had to "take of each other the best they could" according to Sylvia and those detailed to work in the hospital had a difficult job.

Alfred was working in the hospital when he was overcome with heat stroke and became one of the patients. As the system to care for the men grew better organized, Alfred was moved north to St. Louis and again, Sylvia went with him. He was discharged from St. Louis. His discharge noted that he had been off duty for four months. The reason for the discharge was stated as "Spasmodic asthma--harassing cough, distressing difficulty of breathing, the paroxysms' becoming more frequent, congenital deformity of chest, 46 years old, Disease prior to entering the service."

Sylvia took Alfred home to the farm in Rice County and continued to care for him. By the spring of 1864, with the war grinding on and Alfred's health much

improved, he decided to enlist again. He went to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and enlisted in the infantry on March 28, 1864. He was paid a bounty of \$60 with another \$240 promised for his agreement to serve three years. Alfred was not mustered in until June 25th at Madison, then he was sent to Petersburg, VA, where the 37th Wisconsin Infantry was camped. Alfred was to be a member of Company K, but he did not serve much with them. By July, the company muster roll showed him as "sick in hospital." The muster sheets for Company K never listed Alfred as anything but "sick in hospital" or "absent sick" all the way through to the end of the war. Sylvia had again gone with Alfred and she did some nursing at City Point, Virginia, where Alfred was sent to the hospital. When Alfred was mustered out of the army on July 17, 1865, he was still noted as "absent sick." An additional note on his muster out roll said he had drawn \$54.48 in clothing since joined and was still owed \$240 in bounty money. It also said he had last been paid on August 31, 1864. If Alfred collected everything owed him, he and Sylvia went home with a significant amount of money.

The descriptive rolls for Alfred show a discrepancy in what he said was his age. Upon enlistment in the Battery, he said he was 47. His discharge agreed with that, but when he enlisted in the infantry two years later, he said he was 43. Alfred's death certificate said he was born in 1815, a date that matches what he said on the Battery's muster in roll.

After the war, Alfred and Sylvia lived in St. Paul until at least 1874. Not long after, they moved to Melrose in Stearns County where Alfred taught school. The career was short as Alfred died on January 30, 1877. He was buried in the Oakland Cemetery just outside of Sauk Centre, his grave marked with a military stone bearing 37th Wisconsin Infantry, the unit he was in the longest. In 1924, Sylvia was laid to rest beside him. She also has a military marker over her grave.



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: 23 September 2019