



## 2nd MINNESOTA BATTERY

# “ACTION FRONT”

Circular No. 192

November 2011

### On This Date-150 Years Ago

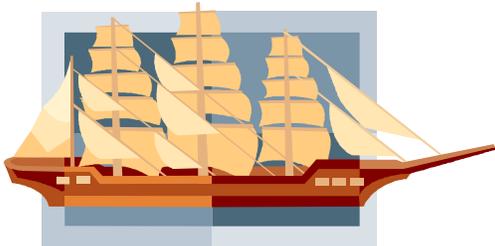
#### **The Trent Affair**

(Compiled from several Civil War web resources)

The Trent Affair, also known as the Mason and Slidell Affair, was an international diplomatic incident that occurred during the American Civil War. On November 8, 1861, the *USS San Jacinto*, commanded by Union Captain Charles Wilkes, intercepted the British mail packet *RMS Trent* and removed, as contraband of war, two Confederate diplomats, James Mason and John Slidell. The envoys were bound for Great Britain and France to press the Confederacy's case for diplomatic recognition by Europe.

The initial reaction in the United States was to rally against Britain, threatening war; but President Abraham Lincoln and his top advisors did not want to risk war. In the Confederate States, the hope was that the incident would lead to a permanent rupture in Anglo-American relations and even diplomatic recognition by Britain of the Confederacy. Confederates realized their independence potentially depended on a war between Britain and the U.S. In Britain, the public expressed outrage at this violation of neutral rights and insult to their national honor. The British government demanded an apology and the release of the prisoners while it took steps to strengthen its military forces in Canada and the Atlantic.

After several weeks of tension and loose talk of war, the crisis was resolved when the Lincoln administration released the envoys and disavowed Captain Wilkes's actions. No formal apology was issued. Mason and Slidell resumed their voyage to Britain, but failed in their goal of achieving diplomatic recognition.



### Upcoming Events

#### **November 11, Veteran's Day, Winona, MN**

Plan to arrive by 10:00 am so logistics can be worked out with plenty of time. The program is held in Veterans Park by Lake Winona, starting at 11:00 a.m. in memory of the end of WWI (11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month). Our Bugler Bill will play *To The Colors* to open the program and close it with *Taps* after the gun has fired for the last time. We will be firing three times during the program and perhaps a couple more demo times after the program. (Remember how great the echo is over this lake?!) Ladies are invited to attend in their finery to add color and show their respect for the veterans of our nation.

Confirm your attendance with Brian T or John Cain if you have not already done so.

#### **December 10, Rum River Library, Anoka**

**Civil War Christmas!** We will interpret the things soldiers in the field and those at home were doing to celebrate the season. Please be thinking about what you want to do—we want this to be different than the Winter Camp we did last March (we're doing that again in February), so start thinking about an 1860 holiday.

Ideas for soldiers include writing/reading letters, making a gift from camp materials to send home, decorating a tree from things in camp, planning a camp Christmas dinner for the troops, singing Christmas hymns, etc.

The home front activity ideas can include some of the same things as the soldiers, as well as packing Christmas boxes, planning special foods or clothing, traveling to visit family/soldiers, etc.

Other ideas are encouraged! Please let Vickie know what you plan to do so she can coordinate the activities—we don't all want to be doing the same thing!

#### **Next Meeting**

##### **December 10, 2:00 or so**

We will have our meeting at the conclusion of the Civil War Christmas event in Anoka. This will be a short meeting—the only topic is the National Event at Shiloh, Tennessee in April of 2012.



# Battery Profile

## Wilber Nichols

*There is no hope of his again being of any Value to the Service. He had Earned the high consideration of a Good soldier. at the time of muster he was considered an Athletic Powerful Man, his Early Discharge is recommended.*

This notation on the certificate of disability discharge ended Army life for Wilber. He was suffering with varicose veins that he described as "ulcerated" and edema in his legs. He had been in the hospital since November 26, marching would have been almost impossible for him, and the prospects were that he would not be fit for duty again, so Wilber was discharged on February 16, 1863.

When Wilber enlisted on October 30, 1861, he may well have believed he would be serving in the First Minnesota Battery which was forming up at the time. For some reason, he did not join that unit, but transferred instead to follow William Hotchkiss into the Second Battery. Wilber was a farmer from Hennepin County, and the two may have known each other. When Wilber enlisted, he said he had been born in Concord, New York, was 34 years old, had black eyes and hair, a dark complexion, and stood 5' 9" tall. He was married, having taken as Harriet as his wife on January 1, 1855, when they were living in St. Anthony Falls, Minnesota. Wilber served as a corporal in the Battery.

While Wilber was off serving in the Army, his wife took their children and went back to Connecticut to live. Wilber wrote her several letters from camps of the Battery, telling her in great detail how he was sending money home to her in a letter with another person he trusted as he did not trust the mail. Wilber wrote, "he can tel you how I have been I do not get any letters from you yet I do not know the reson nor can under Stand why my letters do not come by thare had been a change in our male matters that I hope will improve them the mail is cared now by Champlins and Qarter master Shargents and I hope that I shall hear from you." Spelling was probably not Wilber's strongest attribute.

Though only a corporal with an artillery battery, Wilber had some thoughts on how the war was being waged. In September of 1862, the Battery was camped outside of Louisville, Kentucky. Wilber's letter was dated September 27, 1862.

*I truly do Thank God that I am agane permitted to write to you in hopes to receive and andser we hav had our communication cut off So that we could not here from the North or northern army nor our dear friends. we hav marched from Mississippa to here on half ratiens and Some of the time not more that 1 meal per day it had been a hard march and a long one I hav not written nor had a letter sence we left (?) Miss I lost my day book son after we left So I ha been lost ever sence because I have nothing to refur to to git any account of our march be we come by the way of Boling Green and Green River whare we come within 12 miles of General Brag army and lade over two days so not to intrude upon is honor when he evacuated then we chast them here vary careful not to intrude upon him this is the greatest humbug of a ware that ever was recorded where thoses that hav command do all that they can to assist the redels get away and it has been in this case we might have captured Bragg hole army if we could have fought them but no we must chase them and be vary carefull not to git to close if the men in thare (?) git to cloce march them over the Same ground 4 or 5 times to delay them as match as posable this has been the case here day before yestarday we marched 8 miles over 4 time which delade the army a hole day and give the enemy the Same Start if this is the way this war is to be caried on the Soner the contest is given in the better*

Wilber must have had enough of complaining about the army tactics as he switched pages and thoughts quickly, wondering how Harriet and the children were getting along and if they had enough money. He admits to not knowing how he could be of much help, but wanted to know how she was getting along just the same. He wrote how surprised he was that he could stand the hard life, but did admit to Harriet a little about the pain and trouble he was having with his legs. Still, it was another illness that bothered him more.

*I hav been home Sick ever Since I got to the Ohio River it looks so natural and made me think of old times our bagage teame was left at Boling green to follow in the rear we hav herd that they have been Captured by the rebel Guirleas band and they hav been ther but we do not bleave it yet if it be true my cloths are all gon except what I hav on my back and they are but few for I did not take hardley enough to keep me comfortable theses cold night write to me as son as you git this*

The next letter Wilber wrote was dated October 19th and he covered a variety of topics, including the problems with his legs in a little greater detail. He was relieved that they were to stay in camp for a while as a message had come giving the impression that the South was seeking peace, but he was not sure the message was truthful.

*our army cannot move at all and the rebels will hav plenty of time to fortify thare armeys so to contiue the horable war another year Sutch works is outragus to any matien dont you think so to keep us deperated year after year for nothing at all but for the officers to make money*

Wilber went on about inspections and the number of men on sick call, then described the land that the Battery was camped in.

*O I tel you Harriet that theses poor people must Suffer this winter thare is no money nor is thare any produce here you must hav Some Ideah to know that two armeys of 100 thousand each and nerely as maney horses marching threw a country must Strip if of all kinds of produce and the reble army tuck possession of all the mills and wheat that was thrashed and ground it to flour to take with them besides all the Cattle and horses that belong to union people it is told that they had 15000 had of cattle and the most of thare army wer mounted that these that wer not had left thare army*

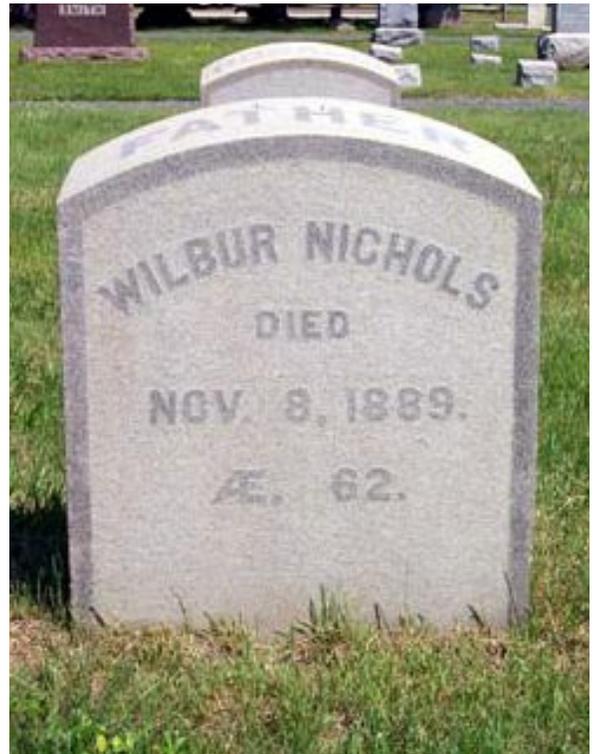
(Nichols, continued)

Without changing paragraphs or sentences, Wilber went on to ask about Harriet's father's business and other things about home. He wondered how much land values were going to drop because of the Indian uprising in Minnesota and believed there would be no more "emigration" for a long time. He bragged about the wonderful breakfast he'd made because he'd been issued flour, salt, "baken and beef and Sugar and coffy" for their "ratiens" and now he had no right to complain.

Each letter Wilber wrote ended with the same thoughts: *"So I will bid you good bye agane with mutch love kiss the Children for me tel them that father loved them all as well as when he ever did youre affectionate Husband Wilber Nichols."*

After he was discharged at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Wilber went to find his family in Connecticut. No record of his ever returning to Minnesota has been found. For a time, he moved to Massachusetts, but went back to Wallingford, Connecticut, where he stayed for the rest of his life. In 1882, Wilber applied for a pension because of the problems with his legs. He blamed his varicose veins and edema on the many hours he spent riding a horse and the exposure to cold and wet after the battle at Perryville, Kentucky. As a witness to his problems, Wilber suggested the Pension Department speak to Captain Hotchkiss. It did not help Wilber's case as the examiner wrote that William Hotchkiss was "unreliable" as a witness.

Wilber died in North Haven, Connecticut, on November 8, 1889, at the age of 62.



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## Some Christmas Stories from the War

Perhaps these will inspire you to a special activity for our own Civil War Christmas event on December 10. Check out this website for more: <http://www.civilwarwomenblog.com/2006/12/civil-war-christmas.html>



The most famous Christmas gift of the war was sent by telegram from General William Tecumseh Sherman to President Abraham Lincoln on December 22, 1864. "I beg to present you as a Christmas gift, the city of Savannah," wrote Sherman, "with 100 and 50 guns and plenty of ammunition, also about 25,000 bales of cotton."

But General Sherman's soldiers did not forget about the impoverished Southerners. On Christmas Day, they loaded several wagons full of food and supplies. Using tree branches as antlers, they turned their mules into 'reindeer' and delivered their gifts in the ravaged Georgia countryside.

In Richmond, Sallie Brock Putnam spent her Christmas of 1861 sewing caps, stockings and scarves for the soldiers. She and her fellow citizens found the comfort of the soldiers during the coming winter to be foremost in their minds.

By 1863, the Union blockade of the Southern coasts had made it nearly impossible for Santa Claus to visit homes in the South. Quite a few mothers explained to their children that even Santa Claus would not be able to run the blockade.

In Georgia, Confederate nurse Kate Cumming was up before daylight making eggnog for the patients in the hospital where she worked. She could not find enough eggs to serve everyone so the holiday treat was given to the wounded, the cooks and the nurses. One of the doctors had provided turkeys, chickens, vegetables and pies - a wonderful meal, but Kate's enjoyment was dampened by the thought that the men on the battlefield had not fared so well.

Christmas carols were sung both at home and in the camps by homesick soldiers during the Civil War. Some of the most popular were Silent Night, Away in a Manger, Oh Come All Ye Faithful and Deck the Halls. But Christmas also made the heart ache for home and loved ones.

The decorations were homemade: strings of sugared fruit, ribbon, popcorn, pine cones, colored paper, silver foil, and spun-glass ornaments. Greenery, holly, and mistletoe were used to decorate mantels windows, and tables.

# Edward Bloomfield

While we don't usually have a recap without an event in the past month, we do have a "result" from a September event.

While the Battery was at the Kandiyohi County Historical Society in Willmar, their director showed Battery members her Civil War exhibit. One portion of the exhibit was photos and information about the Civil War soldiers or veterans from their county and included in their list was four men who served in the Second Battery.

It didn't take long for us to connect with Jill and coordinate an information swap as they had a photo of Edward Bloomfield! It was an image in the newspaper, so not the best quality, but it is our Edward!

Edward only lived in Kandiyohi County for a short time and he ended up near Sauk Center where he died in 1927 and was buried in an unmarked grave. We discovered him and set a stone for Edward in 2002.

What great fun it is to find another image of one of our Battery boys and even better to share what we know about the others who had a connection to Kandiyohi County with them!



***The Second Minnesota Light Artillery Battery is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of Civil War history by living it.***

*Membership is \$12 per year. Non-member newsletter subscription rate is \$6.00 per year.*

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