



## 2nd MINNESOTA BATTERY

# “ACTION FRONT”

Circular No. 266

April 2019

### On This Date-155 Years Ago

#### Winona Daily Republican April 20, 1864

LIEUT. R. DAWLEY of the Second Minnesota Battery, having resigned his commission, has returned home from the field, and arrived here yesterday, after an absence of two years. From him we learn that three-fourths of the men in the battery have reenlisted -- 47 in number, exclusive of the sick and new recruits -- and that they will return to the State on furlough within the coming week. The battery had been doing service in GEN. THOMAS' department, near Mission Ridge, during the past winter.

This was one of the articles that provide some insight into what was going on with our Battery boys in the spring of 1864. Veterans—those who had enlisted early in the war—were asked to reenlist. Men who had too much time left on their enlistment were not eligible to reenlist. Those men who could not reenlist and earn the 30 leave were assigned to Battery I of the Second Illinois until the Second Minnesota came back to the field.

This came on the heels of a controversy in the leadership of the Battery. A letter to Minnesota's governor stated that many of the men in the Battery did not want to reenlist if Captain Hotchkiss was left in command. The men who signed the letter had suggestions as to who should be promoted and it promised that they would not reenlist if Hotchkiss remained in command.

It is unclear what happened, but the men who signed that letter did reenlist and Hotchkiss did stay in command. There was some significant turnover of lieutenants with several resigning their commissions and other men being promoted. At least some of these resignations are related to the dislike expressed of Hotchkiss as stated by the men themselves.

### Upcoming Events

**May 4-5 Spring Valley VFW, Spring Valley, MN.** Encampment with learning stations on Saturday and parade on Sunday. This is in partnership with the Boys of '61. Details to follow.

**May 18 Game Haven BSA Council, Rochester, MN.**

This will be set up like a school event at the scout facility just south of Rochester. More details are expected shortly, so please check on the status of this event **before** you start driving!!

**May 20 Avail Academy School. Edina, MN**  
4015 Inglewood Ave S, Edina, MN

This is the school we know as Calvin Christian School. All that has changed is their name. **Arrive at 9:00** to set up, students arrive at 9:50. We will set up 5 stations and rotate students through. **BRING A BAG LUNCH!**

**May 27, Red Wing, MN Memorial Day**

Arrive at Bay Point Park by 8:00 to set up. There will be a reading by one of our Battery ladies for the Memorial Day service and honor volleys from our gun. RSVP to Daryl Duden or John Cain.



### Next Meeting

**,April 27, 2019, 11:00am**

Marie's Underground Dining, Red Wing  
Call Ken Cunningham with questions or agenda items. 651 388-2945.



# Battery Profile

## 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 commander 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, on November 1, 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 their 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, and then he was sent to Petersburg 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.





# Biting the Bullet?

We've all heard the stories and even seen bullets with teeth marks in museum, but did Civil War soldiers really bite on a bullet when they had painful medical procedures? This article from *"History Myths Debunked"* did some research on this story.

Recent research by a medical school in the Midwest that shows some of the bullets that have been found on battlefields and claimed to have been chewed on by Civil War soldiers, in fact, were chewed on by Civil War soldiers. They were clearly made with human teeth. We also know from compression tests done on these bullets that, in fact, human teeth can bring enough pressure to bear to dent an original Civil War bullet.

What does this mean however? There are no medical accounts found to date that ever talk about using a bullet, or for that matter, using a rope or piece of leather within a surgical atmosphere. They simply don't exist. Now we're not saying that none can. It's just interesting with volume-upon-volume of work that has been written about Civil War medicine from the original practitioners that these items are never mentioned. However, in many of the medical texts of the period used to train these surgeons, it was noted that the aspiration of foreign bodies that might be in the mouth was a distinct problem and possibility and could result in death. Why, then would any surgeon place an object into the mouth, having been warned of the possibility of aspiration? Why would he do that, especially knowing that the man might scream out in pain and swallow whatever was in his mouth. Whether it was a portion of a stick, a bullet, a piece of leather or even a piece of rope. It does not make medical sense. But it also does not meet with the historical record that exists.

Going back to anesthesia, one more thing comes to mind – why would they do that when they had anesthetics to relieve the patient's stress? Why wouldn't they use anesthesia? Well, I said in the beginning that, according to the Union at least ninety-five per cent of all operations took place under general anesthesia. There are two reasons that this may not have happened. The first occurs when the air way is impaired or when the patient is so depressed in his breathing that the giving of anesthesia would be considered fatal. Also possibly in maxillo-facial injuries, it's highly corrosive and may not have been given in those instances either. The other reason would be if the anesthesia ran out. For instance, at Antietam, we know the anesthesia on the Union side was very short. They simply didn't have enough supply. In these cases, the surgeons declared very clearly that they delayed operations until supplies could be found, meaning they stopped operating at that point. The fact is, there may have been some cases that came through the hospitals which were so severe and so intense when it comes to time that they had no choice but to operate immediately to save the life, and we know that in some cases this certainly occurred.

But general anesthesia? It was available. It was common, it was common on both sides. So, no, soldiers didn't bite on bullets for pain.

So why did they bite on bullets? That becomes another issue. We don't know. The fact is, we're simply unsure. However, there is a theory that soldiers did – pardon the use of the term – did "silly" things in camp.

They made lead cannons and tried to shoot them off. We have the remnants of some of those pieces. They had louse races. They raced cock roaches and bull frogs and everything else they could find. They also challenged each other to do stupid things. This is not uncommon in the young male population. It is certainly possible that men chewed on bullets either because they felt at the time it would relieve moisture problems in the mouth, specifically causing salivation which – it was believed – quenched one's thirst. We know that is, in fact, not the case. The second reason may have simply been "on a bet." "Watch this!" or "Can you do this?" We don't know, but research is certainly going to continue on this highly challenged aspect of Civil War medicine.



The article provided a paragraph documenting the sources of their research:

George Wunderlich is the Executive Director of The National Museum of Civil War Medicine (NMCWM) in Frederick, MD. The NMCWM is a "living" institution that utilizes the history of Civil War medical innovations to inspire, engage and encourage, connecting the lessons of the past with the challenges of our world today. The main museum is located at 48 E. Patrick Street in the Carty Building. The Pry House Field Hospital Museum occupies the historic Philip Pry Farm on Antietam National Battlefield. NMCWM Press, established in 2001, provides mission support by enabling the organization to get the word out regarding material pertinent to history educators and students. The Letterman Institute brings into clearer focus the implications of the stories of those who lived and fought and sought to heal, as well as the far reaching legacy of lifesaving medical, managerial and humanitarian innovations that remain relevant and vital for our world today. Website: <http://www.civilwarmed.org>

# 2019 Calendar of Events

As approved by the membership at the meeting on April 6.

- March 23      Boy in Blue Symposium, Mankato, MN
- May 4-5      Boys of '61 event with the Spring Valley VFW. Encampment with learning stations on Saturday and parade on Sunday. (Paid event)
- May 18      Game Haven BSA Council, Rochester, MN. Watch for more info. School event (Paid event)
- May 20      Avail Academy School (Calvin Christian School) Edina, MN School event
- May 27      Memorial Day Ceremony, Red Wing, MN
- June 15      A.A. Arnold House, Galesville, WI. Encampment (Paid event)
- July 13-14    Civil War Days Reenactment, Waconda, Ill [Civil War Days Reenactment](#)
- July 20-21    Olmstead County Living History Fair & Reenactment, Rochester, MN [Olmstead County Living History Fair & Reenactment](#)
- July 27      Prospect House Museum, Battle Lake, MN. Encampment (Paid event)
- August 4      Red Wing River City Days Parade, Red Wing, MN
- August 24-25    Ahlman's Shooters Round-up, Morristown, MN, (Paid event)
- September 21    160th Anniversary Celebration of Frontenac, MN. Encampment
- September 26    United South Central School, Wells, MN. School event
- October 5-6    157th Anniversary Battle of Perryville, Kentucky

***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.***

***For information on the Battery, please contact:***

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November 11      Veteran's Day Ceremony, Winona, MN

November 16      Goodhue County Historical Society 150th Anniversary, Red Wing, MN

Available information and details of each event will be in the newsletter the month prior to that event. If you have questions, please contact Ken Cunningham, Daryl Duden, or John Cain.