



2nd MINNESOTA BATTERY

“ACTION FRONT”

Circular No. 335

December 2025 & January 2026

On This Date-162 Years Ago

As 1863 was drawing to a close, Union military success enabled President Abraham Lincoln to look beyond just winning the war, and to begin establishing a pathway to return the seceded states into the union. On December 8, 1863, Lincoln issued his Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, designed to “present the people of the states wherein the national authority has been suspended, and loyal state governments have been subverted, a mode in and by which the national authority and loyal state governments may be reestablished within said states.”

First, the proclamation issued a sweeping conditional pardon of “all persons who have, directly or by implication, participated in the existing rebellion” and restoring to them all rights of property, except as to slaves. Specifically excluded from the pardon were all high ranking Confederate civilian and military authorities, persons who left seats in Congress to aid the rebellion, persons who had resigned commissions in the U.S. military to aid the rebellion, and persons who had mistreated black prisoners of war or their officers. For all others, the pardon required only that they take an oath of allegiance to the United States and swear to abide by and support the presidential proclamations emancipating slaves.

Lincoln’s proclamation further declared that once at least 10% of the eligible voters in any of the seceded states had taken the loyalty oath and established a loyal state government, that government would be recognized as the “true government of the state.”

Because Lincoln believed that secession was not legal, he had always maintained that the Confederate states had never actually left the union. His “reconstruction” plan was designed to allow them to resume functioning as states within the union, while preventing them from being dominated by secessionists.

Although the proclamation was supported by most of Lincoln’s fellow moderate Republicans, it was strongly attacked by others. Radical Republicans decried Lincoln’s proposal as being too lenient on the Confederates and objected that it was not sufficiently punitive and did not adequately provide for the protection of the rights and material well-being of the freedmen. Democrats and Radical Republicans also objected that Lincoln’s “ten percent proclamation” was intended to make it easy for

him to install puppet governments in the southern states, whose electoral votes would assure him victory in the 1864 presidential election. Many on all sides questioned whether he had the authority as president to set the terms for states’ readmission to the union.

Nevertheless, following the proclamation, in early 1864 unionists in Louisiana, Tennessee and Arkansas established state governments which were recognized by the federal government.

In an effort to override Lincoln’s lenient proclamation, in July 1864 Radical Republicans in Congress passed the Wade-Davis bill, legislation which would deny any state readmission to the union until a majority of the state’s voters signed an “ironclad oath” that they had never supported the Confederacy, a provision that made readmission of the seceded states practically impossible. Lincoln vetoed the bill.

After Lincoln’s assassination in April 1865, his successor Andrew Johnson attempted to carry forward with Lincoln’s lenient plan of presidential reconstruction. Radical Republicans continued to fight for harsher treatment of the former Confederates, ultimately leading Congress to take control of reconstruction policy and to implement “Radical Reconstruction.”

Events for 2018

Please begin gathering information on events that we may want to consider for the 2025 reenacting season. A list of these potential events will be compiled and discussed starting in February with a final vote on the 2025 calendar in March.

Combined Newsletter

Please note that this is the December AND January newsletter. This is a quieter time in our schedule and there isn’t a lot to write about!

Next Meeting

**January 31, 2026, 11:00, Goodhue
County Historical Society 1166 Oak Street,
Red Wing**

Contact Ken Cunningham with questions or agenda items.



Battery Profiles

Jacob Decondres

Jacob signed his own name on his enlistment papers, but that may have been all the writing he did as he left very little about his life beyond questions.

Muster roles showed Jacob mustering into the Battery on January 28, 1862. He was one of the early members of the Battery and should have been training with them at Fort Snelling. He may not have done much training, though he did go South with the Battery in May of 1862. Jacob was discharged for disability at St. Louis, Missouri, on June 7th. His discharge noted that he had not performed any duty for four months, meaning he had been ill since some time in February.

The descriptive information on his discharge said Jacob was 23 years old, with hazel eyes, dark hair and a dark complexion. He stood an even six foot tall and was a farmer. He had been born in Tompkins County, New York.

Jacob went back to Minnesota and must have recovered rather well as on the 17th of August of that same year, he enlisted again, this time with the Seventh Minnesota Infantry, Company B. Once again, he agreed to serve for three years, but his descriptive sheet said his eyes were blue rather than hazel as they were when he enlisted in the Battery. He was still the same height, his age, occupation, birthplace, and his hair and skin tone remained the same. Jacob collected some cash at the time of his enlistment as he was advanced an entire month's pay, \$13, and a bounty of \$23.

No special remarks appear on his muster sheets until January and February of 1863. There, it was noted that Jacob was "absent at Winona on leave of 20 days." He was due back at the end of February. That did not happen as his muster sheet said by order of Colonel Miller, Jacob was detailed for Battery duty at Fort Snelling. The Third Minnesota Battery was forming and perhaps because of Jacob's earlier experience in the Second Battery, he was detailed to serve in the Third Battery.

However, those orders do not match what appears in the Third Battery's records. The Third Battery muster roll said Jacob joined the unit on October 2, 1862, at Camp Release in Minnesota, a transfer from the Seventh Infantry. Exactly when Jacob left the Infantry and where he joined the artillery is unknown.

Something else was going on and records do not explain what. The Battery's November/December muster sheets noted Jacob had to forfeit four days pay by sentence of general court martial at Fort Snelling on December 22, 1863.

The January and February 1864 muster roll for the Battery said Jacob was sick in the hospital and the March/April sheet said he was retransferred to the Seventh as his original transfer had been canceled.

Jacob's muster sheets begin again in the Seventh Infantry with the March/April 1864, sheet, noting he was "on detached service" to the Third Battery. In April, it said Jacob's transfer was invalid and his name was to be taken up on the roll of the Seventh once more.

It was probably a moot point as the muster sheets list Jacob as "sick in Hospital at Davenport, Iowa" in May and June of 1864. July found Jacob listed as back at Fort Snelling and serving on detached service

there. The same notation was made on every muster sheet for Jacob until the May/June 1865, muster. There it said Jacob was discharged on May 10, 1865 from Davenport, Iowa. Had Jacob really made it back to Fort Snelling or had he remained in the hospital at Davenport?

On the records of the Seventh Infantry, Jacob's account was settled at his discharge according to what they believed to be correct. He owed \$28.55 for clothing and money advanced to him prior to August 31, 1864. Their records also showed he was due another \$25 in bounty money. There is a discrepancy of \$2 in how much he got and how much the Seventh *thought* he got for a bounty when he enlisted and Jacob probably was shorted that \$2.

The tangled trail of service records Jacob left is more than what is known about the remainder of his life. No trace of Jacob has been found in any record until a request to the Veterans Department was made for a military tombstone to mark his grave. The request was undated, but asked for the stone to be sent to the Union Cemetery in Port Washington, Wisconsin. Cemetery records do not include a burial date and the county records do not have a death certificate for Jacob. Local newspaper indexes do not list Jacob's name, so not even an obituary gives any glimpse at his life.



A Fun Christmas Story!

(This story appeared in Civil War Records as printed on their Facebook page)

John Christmas was twenty nine years old when he enlisted in the 1st Wisconsin Heavy Artillery regiment in 1864. His service seemed fairly routine, with nothing too out of the ordinary noted in his records. That is, until January 1865, shortly after Christmas was over. John Christmas went hunting on the property of William Bryant, a resident in the area. He shot four deer and found himself on the naughty list. He was court martialled for his actions.

Draw your own conclusions as to why someone named Christmas was hunting for multiple deer right after Christmas. The court martial transcript showed that he was asked several times if there were any special markings on the deer. John claimed ignorance, saying that he didn't know the deer were tame and belonged to the land owner, and he was acquitted.

That wasn't the only time that someone tried to stand the way of Christmas, though. His pension file shows that it took more effort than usual to get his pension application approved. He was initially rejected, on the grounds that there was no Christmas found in the records. Someone had made the list, and after checking it twice, there really was a Christmas in that regiment. He was eventually approved.

John Christmas was married twice. His first wife was named Mary. That's right, she was named Mary Christmas. Mary died in 1896, and John remarried shortly after. His second wife was named Flora Bell. And yes, her middle name really was Bell.

In the matter of the above-described claim for pension, personally appeared before me a Notary Public in and for the said County and State, Flora B. Christmas age 47 years, whose P.O. address is Nansen, County of Cathlamet, State of Ten who being by me first duly sworn according to law declares that She is the claimant in the said claim and that she is unable to furnish Record Evidence as to the birth of her daughter, and ward Mary Christmas from the fact that no report of the child's birth was made by the attending physician to the County Clerk

You would think that the Christmas presence would have been proof enough, but it became Flora's job to verify that she had a Mary Christmas. How do you prove that there is such a thing as a Mary Christmas, though, when the people who mattered don't believe?

One by one, people came forward to lend their support, testifying that they knew the couple, that they knew there was a Christmas marriage, and that John and Flora did have themselves a little Mary Christmas. Two ladies, both also named Mary, wrote statements that they knew the couple. The doctor who delivered the baby gave an affidavit stating that, despite the lack of any official record of it, he knew there was a Mary Christmas. He didn't know that the law required him to have recorded the existence of Mary Christmas.

All of the evidence gathered was enough. The wise men at the pension bureau believed that there was a Mary Christmas and that Flora did qualify for the widow's pension. Both mother and daughter were approved for the Christmas pension benefits.

It took a fight to prove it, but in the end, the community rallied together and showed that it was more than just a wish for a Mary Christmas-- there really was a Mary Christmas in their town. That one birth changed everything.

Merry Christmas!

IX. 5th. John Christmas, private, Company B, 1st Wisconsin Volunteer Heavy Artillery.

CHARGE—"Conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline."

Specification—"In this, that he, John Christmas, a private, Company B, 1st Wisconsin Volunteer Heavy Artillery, did, on or about the 11th day of January, 1865, wilfully shoot and kill one or more tame deer, the property of one William Bryant, a citizen. This on the farm of said Bryant, in the County of Fayette, State of Kentucky."

To which charge and specification the accused pleaded, "Not Guilty."

FINDING.

The Court, having maturely considered the evidence adduced, finds him, John Christmas, private, Company B, 1st Wisconsin Volunteer Heavy Artillery—

Of the Specification, to the CHARGE "Guilty," except the words "on the farm of said Bryant," but attach no criminality thereto.

Of the CHARGE, "Not Guilty."

And the Court does, therefore acquit him.

X. The proceedings and findings are approved and confirmed. Private John Christmas, Company B, 1st Wisconsin Heavy Artillery, will be released from confinement and restored to duty with his command. The Provost Marshal General of the Department of Kentucky is charged with the execution of this order.

John and Flora Bell decided that they needed a little Christmas, so they had one child, born in 1897. They named the baby after John's first wife, and John once again had a Mary Christmas. Sadly, John died tragically in a railroad accident later that same year.

Flora Bell Christmas had trouble getting approved for her widow's pension. There were questions about whether she qualified for a widow's pension under the laws in place when John died. What's more, though, is that there was no record that there really was a Mary Christmas. Flora said she was born, but no one could prove on paper that a Mary Christmas existed. When officials demanded proof, it all came down to a single question: What child is this?

aforesaid case as follows:

I am a practicing Physician of seven years practice. I was present in the capacity of attending Physician at the birth of Mary Christmas a daughter born to John Christmas and his wife Flora B. Christmas on the 25th day of September 1897. I fix the date by reference to my account Book

I did not report the birth of this child to the County Clerk, not knowing at that time that the law required me to do so. Consequently no record of her birth exists at the County Seat

Recap

November 11, Veterans Day, Winona, MN

This annual recognition in a beautiful park on November 11th brought out the 2nd Battery to participate in Veterans Day ceremonies in Winona. It was a typical weather day for the month and the crew performed its duties firing three 12 ounce charges in a salute during the program. All crew members were instructed and or shown their responsibilities prior to the ceremony.

Note to next year: When you arrive early, @15 minutes earlier then we have been, the parking lot is empty enough to park the truck and trailer in any given stall for unloading and loading.

This also allows time for organizing the crew in their duties and equipment.

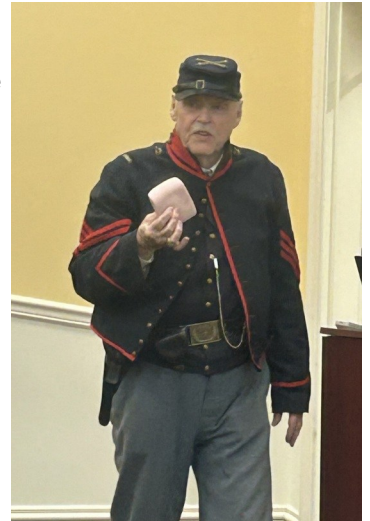
FYI: The new ramps are much lighter and should only be used on level ground to avoid slippage. The ramps do tilt if the wheels are not centered on the ramps. When the gun meets the upper edge of the ramps, the lower ends come off the ground to about knee high. Things to remember for next year!



November 25 – Providence Academy, Plymouth, MN

Daryl Duden and Neil Bruce drove up to Providence Academy in Plymouth, MN to provide a Civil War learning experience for the school's fifth grade students. We arrived at the school at 8:15am and set up in their Team Room for a 9:00am program. This room was similar in design to their Lecture Hall that Daryl Duden used last year to conduct a Civil War learning experience, only slightly smaller. We laid out all our show & tell items on the tables they provided, downloaded from a thumb drive all the slides we planned to show and waited for the students to arrive. One by one, the four classes arrived and promptly took a seat in the five tiers of theater style seating. Soon the room was filled with seventy-four students and their four teachers, Mrs. McElroy, Ms. O'Brien, Mrs. Reopelle and Mrs. Welch. In the one-hour program, we covered a

wide variety of topics, from the events leading up to the war, Minnesota and the 2nd Battery Light Artillery's involvement, U.S. and C.S. uniforms and equipment, rations, war time currency, etc. to weapons (sabers, pistols, rifles) used in the conflict. We finished our program with a 15–20-minute Q & A session. When Neil Bruce asked, "Are there any questions?" seventy-four hands went up. This was an exceptional group of students in what is an exceptional pre-K thru 12 independent, non-profit Roman Catholic school. Respectfully submitted, Bvt. Sgt. Duden



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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