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A Man of Mystery: An Introduction to Mr. Clark Gardner

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A Man of Mystery: An Introduction to Mr. Clark Gardner

Abstract

Clark Alving Gardner was born on June 20, 1839, to Peleg and Julia Gardner in Rodman, New York, a town in Jefferson County. He was the oldest of five children. On July 31, 1862, at the age of twenty-three years, Gardner enlisted in the Black River Artillery, and was called to service on September 11 of the same year.

The Black River Artillery originated from Sackett's Harbor, New York, located off the Black River Bay in Jefferson County. The 4th, 5th, and 7th Battalion units of the Black River Artillery were consolidated to form the 10th New York Heavy Artillery regiment on December 31, 1862, shortly after Gardner had joined and one day before President Abraham Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

The Gettysburg Compiler, Civil War, Clark Gardner, Black River Artillery, 10th New York Heavy Artillery, Battle of the Crater

Disciplines

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THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

A Man of Mystery: An Introduction to Mr. Clark Gardner

NOVEMBER 7, 2013

By: Brianna Kirk, '15

Clark Alving Gardner was born on June 20, 1839, to Peleg and Julia Gardner in Rodman, New York, a town in Jefferson County. He was the oldest of five children. On July 31, 1862, at the age of twenty-three years, Gardner enlisted in the Black River Artillery, and was called to service on September 11 of the same year.

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Private Clark Gardner, a soldier in Company B of the 10th New York, was originally part of the 4th Battalion Heavy Artillery, also known as the 1st Battalion Black River Artillery. The 10th New York was called from Fort Richmond in Staten Island and placed on garrison duty in Washington, D.C., to protect the Union capital until May 27, 1864. At that time, they were ordered to join the Army of the Potomac in the field. In June of 1864, the 10th New York attached to the 2nd Division, 18th Army Corps of the Army of the James and transferred to Cold Harbor, Virginia, to assault the Confederate forces. The regiment was then sent to participate in the Siege of Petersburg in mid-June. Attached to a different brigade of the 2nd Division, 18th Army Corps, the regiment was involved in the Petersburg mine explosion, better known as the Battle of the Crater, on July 30, 1864. The 10th New York Heavy Artillery then moved back to protect Washington, fought in the Battle of Cedar Creek in late 1864, and defended the Union capital again until March of 1865 when they participated in the Appomattox Campaign. Finally, the 10th New York ended its service with the final assault and fall of Petersburg on April 2, 1865.



Gardner's regiment had an impressive service record and saw a great deal of action in a number of large campaigns in the final two years of the war. However, Gardner himself was not fighting alongside his fellow privates past the fall of 1863. Somehow, Gardner ended up a double amputee after the war. He was sent to the Veterans Reserve Corps (VRC), also known as the Invalid Corps, while on garrison duty in Washington. What happened to Gardner in the span of a year that caused him to transfer to the VRC without seeing battle? How did he receive wounds that led to an amputation, making him unfit for service?

A significant portion of the information on Gardner resides in the National Archives' Compiled Service Records of the 10th New York Heavy Artillery. For now, Gardner's pension records will have to tell the story. Letters, testimonies, depositions, and correspondences surrounding Clark Gardner provide many different answers to the injuries that led him to be a double limbed amputee. Some come from Gardner himself. Others come from his neighbor and friend, Edward A. Rich, who accused Gardner of pension fraud. More come from Gardner's widow, who claimed to be a double widower of the war and applied for pension increases after Gardner's death in 1909. Still others come from government officials who were suspicious of both Gardner's and Rich's intentions.

Clark Gardner's story is a fascinating mystery; one composed of many discrepancies that do not line up entirely with each other. His story is one of small town drama that is quickly developing into a nineteenth-century soap opera. With so many possibilities, who knows where Gardner's story will lead? To be continued . . .

Sources:

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Image:

"The Battle of the Petersburg Crater: The Crater, as seen from the Union side. From a sketch made at the time." Accessed on Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Digital ID cph 3b20226. Reproduction Number LC-USZ62-72890.