

Back Story to a Civil War Diary

By Ken Artlip

Back a long time ago when I was in 8th grade, my mother was in the hospital and I was sent to live with my grandparents. One day my grandfather, Homer Artlip, told me he was cleaning up his bedroom and he was going to throw away this old diary of his grandfather, John V. Artlip, written during the Civil War. He wanted to know if I would like it instead. Since I liked reading about history, I was happy to claim it. It was very old and worn and somewhat hard to read.

Over the years, I did lots of research about his regiment, the 12th Illinois Cavalry, but I didn't learn about my Ostrander connection for many years. Since I and the diary are getting older and older, I decided to transcribe it to paper last summer. In places, it was hard to read, the soft pencil was fading and the pages were very brittle, but I did it.

What About John⁹ Valentine Artlip (BB#4287, Willem)

John's father Edward⁸ Artlip (BB#3868), from Livingston County NY, brought his family "West" to the rich new farmlands in Wisconsin in 1848; however, a few years later he had moved to DeKalb County in northeastern Illinois. In 1860 Edward⁸ died of consumption at age 49 and his oldest son John Valentine⁹ Artlip took over the farm.

John⁹ and Mary Mead were married in 1858. Mary's father was a rich farmer from Fulton County NY. Her father's farm was in southeastern WI right across the border from DeKalb County IL. In 1859, the couple had their only child a son, John¹⁰ Douglas.

When Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers in 1861, John⁹ joined the 58th Illinois volunteer Infantry, Company G, and went off to war. The 58th took part in the Battles of Fort Donelson and Shiloh both in TN in 1862. The 58th was in the thick of the horrific battle of Shiloh. John was wounded in both legs by the bursting of an artillery shell; he was discharged and sent home.

In the fall of 1863, Lincoln again called for more volunteers to finish off the Confederacy. John⁹, very much against Mary's wishes, joined the 12th Illinois Cavalry to go off to war again. In the early spring of 1864, the 12th was sent to Louisiana to take part in what became known as the 'Red River Campaign'. The whole idea of the Campaign was to capture the Capitol of Louisiana, Shreveport, where the rebels had stockpiled thousands of tons of cotton. The political general who thought the whole thing up, was named Banks; he was from New England; he wanted to run for president in 1864; he wanted the votes and the money donations from the rich mill owners who badly needed the South's cotton. President Lincoln wanted their votes and money also, so he approved the venture even though his military advisors said it was a bad idea.

The **Red River Campaign** was a total and costly disaster for the Union Army and Navy. One of the Confederate's best generals was in charge of the defense and he was dug in and waiting for General Banks and his slowly moving army. He also diverted the Red River so that the Union gunboats got stranded on sand bars. The two armies fought one big battle in front of Shreveport in March and it was a huge Confederate victory; after which General Banks got cold feet and started an even more costly retreat back to

the safety of New Orleans, fighting several engagements along the river and in the humid bayous all the way. When John⁹ and the 12th arrived on the scene, their assignment was to cover the infantry's retreat.

His diary begins in camp in St Louis in March 1864 and ends in hospital in New Orleans and finally in disability discharge in July 1864. As you read John's narrative it is important to know that he is a sick man. He has contracted TB. He is sick almost every day. He is a sergeant. He takes many of his sick men to hospital quite often. He goes too, but he also is in the thick of action during April and May. He'll tell you all about it. He uses some big words and phrases, but he has some spelling problems, especially when excited and under pressure. I did not fix many of his misspelled words. In his honor, I left them the way they were.

In July 1864, John was given a disability discharge because of lung disease. He went home to Roscoe Illinois, was basically unemployed and died of consumption in 1867. He was buried in an unmarked pauper's grave in Roscoe. Mary never remarried. She never forgave him for signing up a second time and he felt very bad about it. Mary lived with their son John¹⁰ Douglas and his family the rest of her life in Beloit, WI. She died in 1923. John Valentine⁹ was given a GAR gravestone over an empty grave in Oakwood Cemetery in Beloit.

This story was published in the April 2017 OFA Journal.