

ALEXANDER WHITLOCK (1840-1919)

The following is some interesting speculation from Harry Whitlock on how Alexander Whitlock may have come meet and marry his wife Mary Catherine Bowyer. The couple were married Jun.16,1865 in Morgan Co., Illinois.

“I found out some interesting things on our family history. Alexander Whitlock married Mary Catherine Bowyer, and I often wondered how these two got together given their ten years difference in ages. Well, I think I have a plausible story.

According to the 1860 US Census the Bowyer’s and the Whitlock’s were ‘next door neighbors’ to the extent that farmers are neighbors. They are listed right by each other on the records. The Bowyer head of household was James E. Bowyer and the Whitlock head was Johnson Whitlock.

Alexander first joined the Union Army in May 1861, enlisting in the 14th Illinois Infantry Regiment. By the end of September or October he was medically discharged and returned home. In 1862 he had regained his health and joined the 101st Illinois Infantry Regiment. He initially enlisted in company E, but was transferred to company G. Also joining this regiment was his neighbor, James E. Bowyer, husband of Althea, and father of Mary Catherine (Alex’s future wife) and Sarah M. James was assigned to company H.

The 101st initially went to Cairo, then served in military operations in the siege and capture of Vicksburg, MS. At one point in the campaign five companies were captured by Confederate soldiers at the town of Holly Springs. These companies were guarding the town inside a perimeter of other Union soldiers, and for whatever reason, these other soldiers dropped their guard and the Confederate’s managed to get into the town. However, Alex’s and James’ companies were not among these because their two companies, along with two others, were guarding the railroad. They managed to fall back to the main Union lines and helped defend the lines when the Confederates attacked.

Since this unit was not up to full strength, it was attached to the 14th Illinois Infantry (the unit Alexander initially joined!) and performed scouting missions for that regiment. In March 1863 the companies were detailed among several gunboats. Company G was assigned on the “Switzerland” and H on the “Lafayette”. Here is where family records and official military history become murky.

The official history of the regiment states that company G and the Switzerland successfully ran the blockade at Vicksburg under fire, which allowed Grant to put forces south of Vicksburg. After Vicksburg fell General Grant supposedly furloughed the entire company for their bravery! The official record provides no further information on the Lafayette, except to say that all these boats and their attached infantry were busy.

Our family records, namely the framed certificate I have, state he served on the Lafayette. Also, his obituary states that. To further mix up trying to decipher the truth of the matter, there is a mark on one of the documents in my copy of his service record that looks like someone tried to indicate he was in both company H and G. I don’t know if there is any way I can prove this, but what I think possibly happened is that there was an unofficial transfer of him from G to H. This could have been at his request to be closer to James Bowyer or other friends in H Company. That’s why the tidbits of personal information we have say he served on the Lafayette, not the Switzerland. Also stated in the personal records are statements that say he was on the Lafayette as it ran the blockade at Vicksburg. It’s possible that Alexander got the names mixed up, but I don’t think that’s possible. The esprit and unit pride soldiers

develop in their unit, or in this case, their gunboat, made Alexander proud of his service with these men, and he would always want to say he served with them. I'm the same way about my service with the unit I was with in the Gulf War.

One other possibility is that the official records overlook mentioning that the Lafayette also ran the blockade, which is something I plan on researching.

After the fall of Vicksburg the regiment was sent up the Ohio River, then down through Kentucky and Tennessee to help capture Atlanta and defeat the south. Somewhere along the way Alexander fell ill again, and he was admitted in the military hospital at New Albany, Indiana. The rest of the 101st, including James Bowyer, continued on. The unit was involved in the bloody fighting at Chattanooga and other places, and it was at Dallas, also called New Hope Church, that James E. Bowyer was killed in action on 25 May 1864. I could find no record of where he was interred, but we have to assume it is in that vicinity. Perhaps I'll be able to find some sort of record when I receive his service record, which I just recently ordered.

The regiment continued campaigning and fighting through Georgia and the Carolinas, into Virginia, and finally, participated in the Grand Review on May 24, 1865. From there the regiment was either marched or transported by railroad or boat to Springfield, IL, where it was disbanded. Oh, but that must have been a powerful, emotional moment for all those veterans. I wonder if Alexander made his way to Springfield to welcome his comrades home?

In any case, it must have been an time of great happiness and great sorrow. James Bowyer and many others, killed in battle or by disease, were not coming home. Althea Bowyer and her two girls must have been so happy to see so many friends and neighbors come home, and so sad their father didn't.

I can't help but think that when the Bowyer's learned their husband and father was dead, that Alexander, not only being a neighbor, but a veteran of the same regiment as James, offered his condolences and was very sad himself, knowing how brave James was. Perhaps Alexander and Mary found strength and comfort in each other, and despite the ten years of difference in age, soon developed a deep love and were married."

This family is detailed on our WHITLOCK25 chart. Alexander Whitlock was the son of Jonathan Johnson Whitlock and Rebecca Wheeler. Alexander was born in Washington Co., Tennessee Jun.10,1840 and died in Franklin, Morgan Co., Illinois Jun.26,1919. Our records show Alexander and Mary had nine children all born in Morgan Co., Illinois.