

Chinaman in the 33rd?

By John Dewey

An interesting article by Thomas P. Lowry and Edward S. Milligan appeared in Volume 2 Number 4 of the magazine North and South entitled "Chinese in the Civil War". According to the article there is currently strong evidence of forty seven ethnic Chinese who served in the war. Thirty-eight of these served in the racially tolerant Union Navy, but there were nine Chinese soldiers also (five Union and four Confederate). One of the Union soldiers, John Tomney (they were often adopted sons of missionaries and had Westernized names) of Company D, 70th New York Infantry, was killed at Gettysburg on the second day. This unfortunate immigrant had his legs blown off and bled to death on the field of battle.

Another interesting item in the article was the astounding claim that Eng Bunker, one of the famous Siamese twins, was actually drafted by the occupying Union military under Major General George Stoneman for labor service. He and his attached brother Chang were wealthy slave-holding planters in Mount Airy, North Carolina and staunch supporters of the Confederacy. When the mistake was realized, as expected, he was quickly given an exemption by the Federals who apparently decided that drafting Siamese twins whether in part or in whole was rather absurd. Still, the twins did sire twenty-two children and two of these, Christopher Wren Bunker (son of Chang) and D.C. Bunker (son of Eng) enlisted in Company I, 37th Battalion, Virginia Cavalry. Christopher was captured by the Federals and sent to the prisoner-of-war camp at Camp Chase, Ohio. D.C. was wounded soon after enlisting and was discharged from service apparently even before his first payday.

On the rosters of the 33rd Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry, Company A, is the name Lewis Wong, resident of Belmont. Was there a "heathen Chinese" in the ranks of the 33rd? Alas, as it turns out, Mr. Wong was described as having light hair and a sandy complexion. He also claimed Norway as his birthplace dashing any speculation that the 33rd had a native of the Middle Kingdom in its service.

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