

In Memory of the Service of My Great-Great Grandfather

Submitted By Scott Shuster - SVC, Edward Lea Camp #2

John S. Darling was born October 1, 1843 in Blacklog Valley, Juniata County in East Central Pennsylvania. He was the first of 6 sons born to Thomas J. and Jane Purvis Darling who were married in Philadelphia on January 2 of that same year.

When the war came in 1861, John was a 17 year old young man, single and living at home with his parents in Tuscarora Valley, Juniata County, where the family moved about 1857. John was employed as a laborer in an unspecified business.

On October 22, 1862, John and his father, being members of the existing Pennsylvania militia, joined for duty and were enrolled in Company F of the 171st Pennsylvania Infantry. The 171st was comprised of several units of the Pennsylvania drafted militia. Thomas and John were enrolled for 9 months service and were mustered in at Camp Curtin, near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on November 2, 1862.

After about a month of training, the unit was assigned to Spinola's Brigade, VII Corps, Department of Virginia and transported to New Berne, North Carolina. From this point, the 171st participated in various expeditions along the North Carolina coast. They saw their only notable action in a skirmish at Blount's Creek, North Carolina on April 9, 1863.

The unit was then ordered to Fortress Monroe, Virginia and upon arrival on June 20, 1863, took part in Dix's Peninsula Campaign from July 1 to July 7, 1863. They were then ordered to Harper's Ferry where they participated in the pursuit of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia as it made its way towards Manassas Gap, Virginia following the Battle of Gettysburg from July 11 to July 24, 1863.

On August 2, 1863, the 171st was ordered to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and mustered out of service by Company between August 6 and August 8. Thomas Darling was present at muster out, but John was not. According to his service record, he became ill on or about July 8, 1863 at Harper's Ferry and had been hospitalized in Washington, DC from that date forward.

After returning home to Juniata County, John either became bored with civilian life, or was stirred by some great patriotic feeling – or perhaps a combination of the two. For reasons never documented, he enlisted in the 49th Pennsylvania Infantry in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on March 18, 1864. He was mustered in at Camp Curtin on April 4, 1864 with veteran status, which earned him a bounty payment of \$60. He was assigned to the new Company G and became part of the great Army of the Potomac's VI Corps, First Division, Third Brigade. According to his service record, John at age 20 stood 5 foot 1 inch tall, had a dark complexion, dark hair, and hazel eyes.

What those hazel eyes saw over the next year probably tested every ounce of his courage and being and likely defined him as a man. If the \$60 bounty was his reason for re-enlistment, at some point, John probably questioned the wisdom of what he had done. As part of the VI Corps, John saw horrific fighting and carnage all during Grant's Overland Campaign – including The Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, actions along the North Anna River and the assaults at Cold Harbor, Virginia.

By June 16, 1864, he was in the trenches around Petersburg, where his unit took part in the initial assault on Petersburg on June 18 and engagements at Jerusalem Plank Road and along the Weldon Railroad.

When the VI Corps was temporarily assigned to General Sheridan to take part in the Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1864, John stayed behind in Virginia. He had been assigned ambulance guard duty at City Point. He remained at City Point until the VI Corps returned to Petersburg in October or November 1864. On October 1, 1864, John celebrated his 21st Birthday.

During this period, on March 7, 1865, John was promoted to the rank of Corporal. Additionally, his pension records indicate that “on or about the middle of March 1865 while on review”, John was “stricken down with sunstroke in camp near Petersburg, Virginia”. It does not appear that he was hospitalized at any point, nor was he reported absent from duty.

Back in the trenches with the 49th, his unit took part in the siege operations around Petersburg and battles at Dabney’s Mill, Hatcher’s Run, as well as the final assault on and capture of Petersburg on April 2, 1865. They further took part in the pursuit of what was left of Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia and engaged those remnants at Sailor’s Creek on April 6.

From April 6 to April 12, the VI Corps was assigned to the escort of Confederate prisoners from Sailor’s Creek to Richmond. Thus, the units who had fought so valiantly during the campaign were not present for the final surrender of Lee’s Army at Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865.

From Richmond, they returned to Petersburg and from April 23 to April 29 participated in the expedition to Danville, Virginia where they stood ready to support and join Sherman’s forces in North Carolina if needed – they were never needed for that purpose.

They moved to Washington, DC in late May where they participated in the VI Corps review on June 8, 1865. The 49th Pennsylvania mustered out of Federal Service at Hall’s Hill, Virginia on July 15, 1865.

Having witnessed and survived some of the most horrific fighting of the war, John returned to Juniata County, Pennsylvania. He married Arabella L. Emory on May 29, 1866. Arabella was the daughter of John and Martha Emory of adjacent Perry County, Pennsylvania. Whether John and Arabella knew each other before the war is not clear.

Shortly after their marriage, the entire Darling family – John and Arabella, John’s parents and all 5 brothers relocated to Venango County in Northeast Pennsylvania and settled in Cornplanter Township, near Oil City. The entire family became heavily involved in the booming oil business, serving as pumpers, engineers and producers.

John S. Darling “died Saturday morning, March 18, 1916 at his home near East Waterford, Perry County, Pennsylvania; death being due to heart trouble and the infirmities of old age”. A lengthy obituary appeared in the “Butler County Citizen” on March 21, 1916 and concluded with the following words:

“During the Civil War, he enlisted in the Army and was engaged in very active service until the close of the war, having taken part in many of the severest battles fought between the North and the South.

Mr. Darling was a man among men. A man who could always be relied upon, and a man whose word was as good as gold. A man who will be missed in the neighborhood where he lived and where he took an active interest in the welfare of the community”.

John and Arabella are buried side by side in the East Waterford Cemetery, East Waterford, Pennsylvania.