

My Story

by Keith Olmanson

My story concerns my great-grandfather, Bernt Olmanson. During the Civil War he was a member of the Second Minnesota Regiment. He was involved in the battles of Mills Springs, KY, Chicamauga, and Atlanta among others. He marched with Gen. Sherman cross Georgia to Savannah and up through the Carolinas and Virginia to Washington, DC. He wrote letters to his partner on the farm near St. Peter, MN and asked that they be saved. He did nothing with them after the war, but now they have been translated and published in a small book.

We quote from a letter he wrote home to Norway describing his part in the storming of Missionary Ridge, TN, the turning point in the war in the west.

"Nov. 25th (1863) at 3 p.m. we advanced in the center and took their entrenchments with a bayonet charge. [Bernt does not mention that the 2nd Minnesota Regiment was deployed as a skirmish line to lead the attack.] But up on the heights the enemy had 45 cannons which was a great problem for us and reduced our ranks in a hurry. We had no way out but to continue up the steep hill and take their cannons with bayonets.

"When it became dark that evening, we had taken the enemy's position. But the toll in dead and wounded was great on both sides. It was a bloody place several miles long that met one's eyes. [Of the regiment's 185 men involved, eight were killed and 31 wounded, just over 21 percent.]

"Several bullets had gone through my hat. I had a waterproof cloth which we call a "rubber blanket." It was rolled together over my shoulders. This cloth is as strong as silk and contained many bullets. I think there are 17 bullet holes in that cloth which is now in the keeping of Andreas Larsen (the partner on the farm) as a reminder of the day my body was unscathed."