

Civil War Portraits

FROM THE DAVID WYNN VAUGHAN COLLECTION

4th Corporal
Amos Newton Kelley Jr.,
Company A, "Gwinnett
Beauregards" 42nd Regiment
Georgia Volunteer Infantry,
Department of East Tennessee
& Army of Tennessee, C.S.A.

The Civil War remains America's deadliest war with fatality estimates ranging from 620,000 to and 850,000 soldiers who died of disease or battle wounds. There were also tens of thousands of post-war deaths from lingering diseases or wounds, which are widely under-reported. 4th Corporal Amos Newton Kelley's death in 1877 would fall into that category. His death was a direct result of a disease he contracted during the war.

Kelley was born in Berkshire, Gwinnett County, on September 30, 1836, the son of Elizabeth S. (Mayfield) and Amos Newton Kelley Sr. By age 20, he was farming the family land and was married to Susan Catherine (Matthews). They had a four-year-old son.

On March 4, 1862, 25-year-old Kelley reported to the Gwinnett County courthouse in Lawrenceville to enlist with the "Gwinnett Beauregards." A few days later, the men marched to Camp McDonald at Big Shanty (Kennesaw), the largest instructional camp in Georgia. The Beauregards were mustered into service as Company A, 42nd Regiment Georgia Volunteer Infantry on April 12. Days later, they boarded a train for Knoxville, Tennessee. On April 20, a detachment of 50 guards, including Kelley, left to escort 476 "Tory" (loyal to the Union) political prisoners to Milledgeville. En route, the expedition diverted to an abandoned cotton mill in Madison, Georgia, where Kelley remained a guard until November 1862.

He rejoined his regiment in Mississippi, where the Union Army and Navy were focused on capturing the Confederate citadel of Vicksburg. A series of battles took place, first at Chickasaw Bayou, north of the riverport city, on December 26, 1862. Three Union divisions made an amphibious landing in a swampy area between the confluence of the Yazoo and Mississippi



river. On December 28, they made several attempts to flank General Stephen Lee's Confederate defenses. Fierce fighting ensued the next day. The 42nd Georgia reinforced Lee's left flank, instructed to "hold it at all hazards." After furious cannonading by Federal artillery, Union infantry moved across a dry lake towards the Confederate trenches. The Federal force broke under galling fire but rallied and moved toward Lee's left, only to be repulsed by the 42nd Georgia and 28th Louisiana regiments. The battle was a resounding Confederate victory. A few months later, April 17, 1863, Kelley was promoted to 4th corporal.

The success of the Confederates at Chickasaw Bayou was short-lived, as Union forces under the command of General Ulysses S. Grant con-

verged on Vicksburg. The Southern army withdrew to the trench lines that protected Vicksburg. On May 18, the Union Army and Navy began a siege that lasted 47 days. The defenders suffered from short rations and a lack of potable water, and Kelley contracted typhoid fever. The Confederates surrendered Vicksburg on July 4, 1863. Corporal Kelley and his regiment, among 30,000 Confederate soldiers, were taken captive. They were paroled on July 6.

Kelley convalesced at home, confined to bed for three months. The fever settled in his right leg. The knee became permanently crooked and stiff, so he had to use a wooden peg leg or a crutch to walk. He never fully recuperated but continued farming. He and Elizabeth raised four children, with a fifth dying in 1862.

His wife's 1897 Confederate pension application states that Kelley was a stout man at the time of enlistment but never recovered from typhoid fever. He died from pneumonia on March 23, 1877, in Gwinnett County and is buried in the Sweetwater Baptist Church graveyard.

In this photo, Kelley wears dark trousers and a matching nine-button frock coat, the end of his sleeves turned back to create a cuff. Across his chest, he prominently displays his hand with two missing fingers. How they were lost is unknown. ■