

Carl Heinz Article about J.P. Grinstead

Article

Just after the turn of the century, Civil War veteran J.P. Grinstead, a Kentucky native, wrote a personal account of his service, hoping to authenticate his claim that he was the youngest commissioned officer in the Union Army.

The following is an excerpt from Grinstead's formal "claim to fame," as it appeared some forty years after the Civil War in the National Tribune, the official organ of the Grand Army of the Republic.

Editor, National Tribune: I desire to answer thru your columns the question being asked by a number of comrades, "Who was the youngest commissioned officer in the service during the Civil War?" by laying claim to that honor and distinction myself. I will ask, however, not to be accused of egotism to what I may say, for unless we write these little bits of personal unwritten history it will never be known, and but few people will ever know that we ever lived. My claim is that I was commissioned younger than any other officer at the front in active service in command of troops or performance of other duties. Now for the proof of my claim:

I was born June 15, 1846, consequently June 15, 1861 I was 15 years of age. About that time I joined Capt. J.B. Terry's company of Kentucky Home Guards at Glover's Creek, Metcalf County, Ky. Later on, in the Fall, this company was disbanded, and I enlisted as a private in Co. E, 9th Ky, Nov. 25, 1861, at Columbia (Camp Boyle), Ky.; was appointed Fifth Sergeant at the organization of the Company. Immediately after the battle of Shiloh [Tennessee] and campaign to Corinth [Mississippi], I was appointed Regimental Commissary Sergeant and on June 18, 1862 I returned to and took command of my company in the chase after [Confederate General Braxton] Bragg thru Kentucky.

On Jan. 10, 1862, immediately after the battle of Stone[s] River [Tennessee], I was promoted to First Lieutenant, and on Sept. 22, 1863, two days after the battle of Chickamauga [Georgia], was transferred to and placed in command of Co. H same regiment, and on Sept. 10, 1864 when at age 18 years and three months, was promoted to Captain of my company. I was mustered out of service by reason of expiration of term of service, at Louisville, Ky., Dec. 15, 1864.

In March 1865, I was authorized by the Governor of Kentucky to recruit a company for State service, to be used against various bands of guerrillas then infesting the State, but the fall of Richmond [Virginia] and the surrender of [Confederate General Robert E.] Lee put a stop to the recruiting of this company.

I was in every battle and skirmish in which my regiment was engaged, including such battles as Shiloh, Stone[s] River, Chickamauga, Missionary Ridge, Pickett's Mills,

Lovejoy Station, and skirmishes too numerous to mention. I received three wounds - one at Stone[s] River and two at Chickamauga.

In addition to the engagements mentioned, the 9th Kentucky participated in the Tullahoma Campaign, and battle at Resaca, Kennesaw Mountain, Atlanta, and Jonesboro, Georgia, and at Perryville, Kentucky.

Grinstead went on after the Civil War to organize three regiments of volunteers in 1898 for service in the Spanish-American War. Early the next year, President William McKinley ordered American troops to the Phillipine [sic] Islands, where Grinstead would eventually command a company of the 32d U.S. Volunteers for two years.

Although his death date is unknown, Grinstead lived the last years of his life in Salem, Nebraska. In this Civil War-era photograph he displays a commissioned officer's shoulder boards.

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[image: photo of J.P. Grinstead in a Union uniform]