

Case Study #2

John Luckey/Jack Tanner

Jack was born to Luckey and Hester Tanner in approximately 1842. Luckey and Hester Tanner were slaves on the plantation owned by Branch Tanner in Clark County Kentucky. John Scott, a fellow slave recalls... *“Tanner was a slave... everybody around him called him Jack Tanner...”* Tanner’s wife continues his story... *“He said he ran away from his master and found a river, and went to Granville, Indiana where he enlisted...”*

Tanner takes his father’s name and enlists in the 23rd U.S.C.I. (United States Colored Infantry) as John Luckey on August 25, 1864. While in the service John Luckey was injured by a gunshot wound, not in battle but by a fellow soldier in a disturbance... *“At or near Petersburg, Virginia, while in the line of duty, about the 20th of September 1864, while quelling a disturbance in his company he (Luckey) was shot in the right side by a pistol ball fired by a member of his own company...”*

Jack’s pension procurement was complicated by his being known by two names. To add to the confusion Jack is given some odd advice from a local official following the war... *“I advised him to do it (marry his wife under both names) that if his wife outlived him, it would give her a great deal of trouble to procure a widow’s pension. He acted upon the advice, and procured a marriage license under the name of Luckey and was married to the claimant a second time.”*

His widow Melinda did outlive him, and also struggled with his identity she explained... *“For a while I did not know he had any other name than Tanner, but in a year or two (after marriage) when there was much talk about pensions, Mr. Tanner said, one day, that his name wasn’t Tanner but Luckey.”* As Melinda sought her husband’s pension benefits, she also ran into institutional bias, as exhibited in this letter about her claim written by a special (pension) examiner. *“...her (Melinda) reputation for truth and veracity is a good average for her class... and (she) is liked by the white residents...”* The pension examiner even mentions the need for photographs to aid in identification. *“... I believe the only thing to do is to exhibit the pictures I have obtained to the list of comrades for identification.”*

John Luckey’s story also displays the unique challenges faced by African-American Union veterans.

SOURCES:

- John Luckey’s pension File certificate #572,189 National Archives and Records Administration.