

Blue among gray?

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On Row 41 of Camp Chase Confederate Cemetery — one of only two places in Ohio officially designated for Confederate dead — is a marker for a John Kennedy.

It's actually a double marker, number 2100. The top half is for a Texas soldier. But the bottom part is what caught the eye years ago of an amateur historian from New Albany who now lives in Georgia.

The stone reads: "John Kennedy; 33 KY VOLS; C.S.A." The Confederate States of America regiments in Kentucky didn't have numbers that high, Dennis Ranney knew. Maybe an extra "3" was added by mistake.

Ranney, 59, likes to learn about Civil War prisons and had first visited Camp Chase, at 2900 Sullivant Ave. on the West Side, as a teenager. Most of the people buried there also were prisoners there. Ranney decided to research the dead and write small biographies about five years ago.

"Some of them have stories to tell," he thought. One of the people he pursued was Kennedy.

No matter how hard Ranney looked in Confederate records, he couldn't find Kennedy. Then, "just for the heck of it," he looked in Union records.

And there he was. This John Kennedy who had been called a Confederate since at least 1869 was actually: "John Kennedy; 33rd Kentucky Infantry; U.S.A."

"Oh my God," Ranney said he thought to himself.

In 1867, Ohio Gov. James Cox ordered a military chaplain to identify all of the war's dead buried in Ohio. The chaplain did the best he could with spotty records, according to historians. Some he determined were Confederates were disinterred and reburied at Camp Chase in 1869.

Many of those, including Kennedy, have markers in Row 41 — the last full row nearest the Hill Top Dairy Twist on Sullivant Avenue. It's the most likely row for identification mistakes. Ranney used online records and physical ones at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., to research other names in that row. He has found five other Union soldiers who he believes are mistakenly called Confederates on their markers:

- James Lykens, Co. A, 12th Ky. Cavalry, CSA, is actually James Likens, Co. A, 12th Ky. Cavalry, USA.
- Jacob Lake, Co. G, 90th Tenn. Regiment, CSA, is Jacob Lake, Co. G, 90th Penn. Infantry, USA.
- J.A. Stilzer, Co. A, 9th Ky. Cavalry, CSA, is J.W. Stitzer, Co. A, 9th Ky. Cavalry, USA.

- Taylor Ellis, Co. B, 1st W. Tenn. Regiment, CSA, is Taylor Ellis, Co. M, 6th Tenn. Cavalry, USA.
- John Clark, Co. G, 3rd Va. Cavalry, CSA, is John E. Clark, Co. D, 3rd W.Va. Cavalry, USA.

Ranney says he has doubts about four other markers but hasn't been able to prove any errors yet.

Members of the Hilltop Historical Society learned of Ranney's work last week. The society leads tours of the cemetery, keeps some historical records and organizes a memorial ceremony every June.

"It's very plausible," Dick Hoffman, a society board member, said of Ranney's findings.

"I believe there's a good possibility that (Ranney's work) is correct," said Monty Chase, another board member and a distant cousin of the cemetery's namesake and Abraham Lincoln's treasury secretary, Salmon P. Chase.

Camp Chase has some known errors, and it's not surprising that there would be others, Hoffman said. Historians know that some people buried at Camp Chase aren't marked at all. They also know that the stones themselves are just approximations of where the soldiers are buried.

Ranney's findings are so new that no one knows if any changes can be made at the cemetery. Monty Chase suggested leaving the stones in place and carving updates on the backs. The big arch at the cemetery says "Americans," and that's just as true now as it ever was, he said.

The Dayton National Cemetery, which oversees Camp Chase, didn't respond to a request for comment.

Ranney has also discovered that the same John Kennedy from Kentucky, identified as a Union soldier, has a marker at Green Lawn Cemetery. Ranney expects that there's more work to be done to sort out Columbus' burial records.

Now, though, he's satisfied that for the first time since the end of the Civil War, six soldiers can be remembered on Memorial Day for who they really were.

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