



Capt. James Smith, and the 1st. Regiment, Illinois Volunteer Light Artillery — 1861



## That was then...

It was early on a Sunday Morning, the 21st. of April in 1861, when the battery saw its first public appearance.

In response to the first call of President Lincoln's call for troops in defense of the nation, Chicago's Governor Richard Yates called the "Chicago Light Artillery" to arms, and within twenty four hours many more men than could be accepted offered themselves in service. Led by Capt. James Smith, the outfit, consisting of a full field battery of four guns, caissons, wagons, forge, and harness assembled in the old armory building at Franklin and Adams streets. Nearly all were young men born or raised in Chicago, educated in her schools, and eager to answer the call.

At 9:00 P.M., amid the tears and shouts of thousands who thronged the lake shore, the battery departed aboard the Illinois Central for Cairo. There the unit mustered into Federal service as Battery A, First Illinois Artillery Volunteers.

During the war, the Battery participated in nearly fifty engagements including Shiloh, Vicksburg, Kennesaw Mountain, Chattanooga, and the Atlanta campaigns.

In all, 262 men served the battery. It was well for them, perhaps, that they could not foresee the future, as more than four years of terrible

warfare would ensue before they would be mustered out, finally returning on July 3rd. of 1865 to the welcome

and excitement of all throughout the city.

## This is now...

In conjunction with the Civil War Centennial of 1962, the 1st. Illinois Volunteer Light Artillery was reactivated and today the members of Battery A are dedicated to preserving this period's history through participation in weekend reenactments, school programs, community parades, and demonstrations of living history.

In parades, the battery offers an impressive spectacle of color guard, limbered artillery piece, mid-parade firing, and cannoneers and ladies in authentic attire.

During a weekend reenactment, the encampment takes on the feel and character of days gone by as members gather with other units to enjoy social camaraderie and the role of public education. As the sun sets and the crackling of the dinner fire replaces the smoke and thunder of battle, candles fill the camps with a warm glow as members enjoy a military ball in period mood and costume.



The Battery Today

## Come along and discover the excitement of ...

- 1860's Camping
- The sights and smells of dinner on the fire
- Civil War history
- Civilian period history and public demonstrations
- The smoke & thunder of full scale cannon fire
- A relaxing break from today's hectic pace
- Camaraderie with your fellow cannoneers



We maintain extra tents, uniforms, and various items for those who would like to experience camp life and a battle reenactment with us.

Inquire of any member about our "Cannoneer for a Day" program. We are a family oriented club and can sometimes outfit ladies and younger children as there are many activities geared toward civilian life in the 1860's.

You can learn more at [www.batteryA.org](http://www.batteryA.org)

# Abbreviated Chronology

of the service of 1st. Regiment Illinois Volunteer Light Artillery – Battery A (Chicago Light Artillery)

1847–November: A unit was organized as the “Chicago Light Artillery” under the leadership of Capt. R. K. Smith.

1861–April, 21: In response to the firing at Fort Sumter and of President Lincoln’s call for volunteers, the first body of troops including “Chicago Light” left Chicago on the Cairo expedition.

1861–April, 24: The steamer “Baltic” in passing on the Mississippi disregarded a blank shot summoning her to land. Then, as a solid ball passed her bow, she decided otherwise. This, from Battery A, was the first shot fired from a field piece in the war for the union.

1861–July, 16: The battery is assigned three years federal service and 85 men mustering in are given 10 days furlough to visit their homes.

1861–September: Gen. Grant orders a movement on Paudcah, KY., forty five miles up the Ohio River at the mouth of the Tennessee. There the battery stayed until the following February.

1861–November: Battery A receives two new howitzers and now has six guns in its unit.

1862–February: Moved up the Tennessee River and landed at Fort Heiman. Took possession of a rebel camp to find campfires burning with hot corn bread and pea coffee on some of them.

1862–April: Engaged in battle at Shiloh, Tennessee. At the end of the first day the battery had fired 838 rounds and suffered the loss of four men with twenty-six wounded.

1862–December: Battle of Chickasaw Bayou, Mississippi. “Toward the later part of the fight we occupied a very exposed position within two hundred yards of the enemy’s works, where we went to work, sending half-second shells among their works so rapidly the rebels found it impossible to return the fire. This we kept up until our ammunition was exhausted, about fifteen minutes before the fort surrendered with its 6,000 prisoners and 10,000 stand of arms.”

1863–July: Fourteen men on a special mission to find forage for the horses, and three miles inside enemy lines, are taken captive and held at various detainment facilities until exchanged in November of 1864.

— continued on rear panel

1863–December: Christmas in Belfont, Alabama. “Here we experienced some of the coldest weather in our whole army service. Pools of water froze over hard enough to hold our mule team and wagon. The blacksmith made a couple pairs of skates and we utilized them for three days on a small pond near the camp.”

1864–April: Toward Chattanooga on the Atlanta Campaign. “As the battery left toward Chattanooga, Mr. Baker came to see them off, bringing with him a bag of nice cakes from the young ladies for their friends in the battery. Miss Mollie sends an extra lot of nice cookies for which she has my sincere thanks.”

1864–November: A special presentation. “Shortly after we reached Chattanooga it was discovered that the battery was entitled to one more lieutenant, and the comrades surprised Spencer S. Kimbell by securing a commission for him and presenting him with a beautiful sword, sash and belt.”

1865–June: Ordered home for muster out. “The war being virtually ended we were finally ordered home for muster out. We arrived home July 3rd., and were welcomed by kind and true friends, to enjoy again the comforts and sweets of civil life. A grand banquet was given in honor of our return and our boys took up the new struggle of life, happy in the consciousness of having done their share towards securing a peace to the country, which it is hoped will be as lasting as the government itself.”

Excerpted from: History of Battery A, First Illinois Light Artillery Volunteers—Charles B. Kimbell—Chicago, 1899

---

Chicago Light Artillery, Battery A, is a 501c3 non profit organization serving to foster awareness and appreciation of the history of the Civil War and of life in the 1860’s. We sincerely appreciate your tax deductible donation.

To inquire about membership or participation of the Battery in a community event, please contact the member listed below or visit us at [www.batteryA.org](http://www.batteryA.org)

-----  
-----  
-----

