Hey! Still reeling from learning I had a Great Great Great Grandfather, Corporal Denias Smith, who served three years in the 7th Michigan Infantry and was wounded at the North Anna and at Petersburg.

Then I remembered a couple photos from William Frassanito’s fantastic photographic history of the Battle of Antietam, which was the first ever battlefield photographed in the immediate aftermath of a battle. I first read this book when I was about 13 and the photos and story stuck with me. And now I am stunned by my connection to them.

The below middle photograph was taken near the West Woods in the northern sector of the Battlefield. Here John Sedgwick’s Division if the 2d Corps was fighting. The photo was taken on 19 SEP 1862, two days after the battle. The photo is of a dead Confederate Soldier and next to it is the grave of a Union Soldier with a wooden headboard his comrades made for him. Under a microscope you can read the inscription, J A Clark, 7th Michigan.

Frassanito did some research and found the identity of the Soldier, it was 1st Lieutenant John A Clark, Company D, 7th Michigan Infantry, a native of Monroe, Michigan. He also found the third photo below of LT Clark taken soon after his promotion in the summer of 1862. He had enlisted the year before and had been made a Sergeant. Killed in the morning of 17 SEP and buried on the field, his father came to the battlefield several weeks after the battle and was able to identify the marked grave and return his son to Monroe where he was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery.

This man would have known my ancestor on an intimate level, they were in the same company!!!!!! This is extraordinary, a thousand regiments in the Army of the Potomac which means there were 10,000 companies, what are the odds of this?! We have a photo of the actual location on the battlefield where D Company, 7th Michigan fought taken two days after the battle. This terrain is what Denias Smith would have seen in the Battle of Antietam! Since a company at this time would have only numbered about 40 men, it is entirely possible that Denias Smith could have helped dig this grave for his LT. If nothing else, he would have seen it. This is something that I have never experienced in my studying if the War, a photo of the actual battle site two days after the battle where someone’s ancestors company fought with the grave of one of his comrades. Just amazing.

And I have Ancestry.com to thank for all of this.
Sarat John Clark.
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