

# Theophilus W. Pinion

## A Short Biography

By Gail Astle  
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**Theophilus (Theopolis) W. Pinion** was born free in 1847 in New Hope, Pennsylvania. Together, he and his father, James Pinion, enlisted on January 2, 1864 in Norwich, Connecticut for a three-year period and were both mustered into service in Co. I, 29th Regiment Connecticut Infantry (Colored) on March 8, 1864 in New Haven, Connecticut. Theophilus was a 5 foot 7-inch-tall, 18-year-old farmer with black eyes, black hair, and a dark complexion.

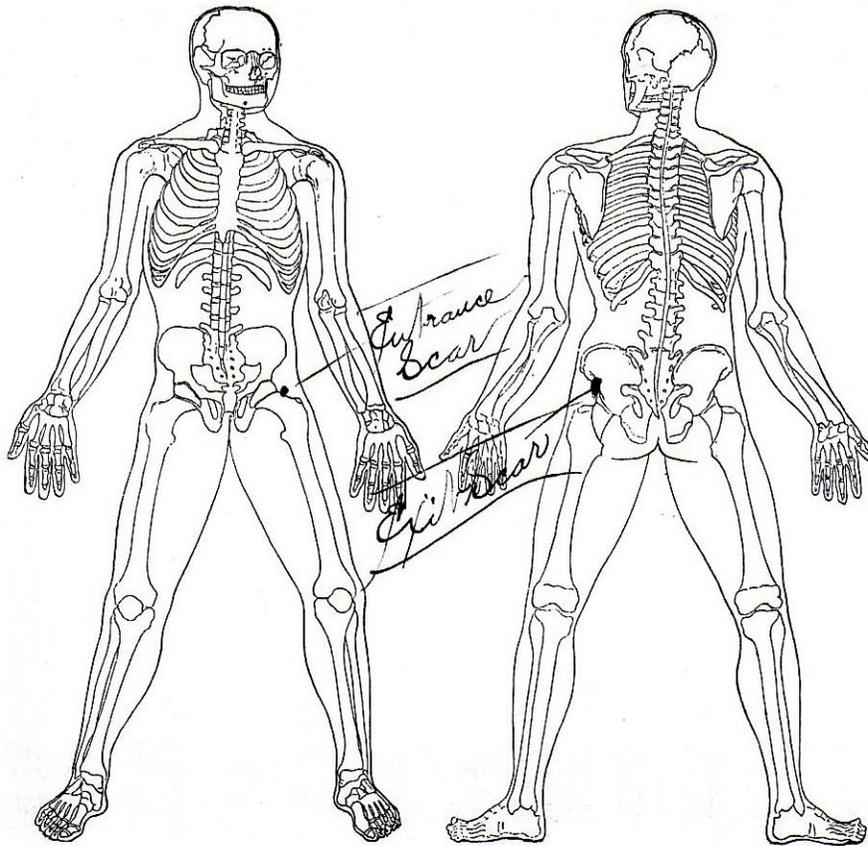
Even though father and son were in the same company, Theophilus did not see much of his 43-year-old father because James was often sick and hospitalized towards the end of the war.

Pvt. Theophilus Pinion was severely wounded in action at Kell House, Virginia on October 27, 1864. A minie ball ripped its way into the left leg in the front of the hip bone, traveled down to the top of the leg or femur bone, shattered it, and then traveled behind and lodged in the gluteus or butt muscle (Figure 2). Surgeons had to remove bone fragments at the head of the femur. The radical removal of mangled tissue would have contributed to a very serious situation. Wounds in the hip and pelvis area were notoriously fatal due to infection.<sup>1</sup> It took around six months to recover in hospitals until there was no threat of serious infection, and the gaping hole in the hip bone and upper leg joined together with scar tissue. He was present for duty from May 1865 until he was honorably discharged on October 24, 1865 in Brownsville, Texas. When he returned home, he was a 20-year-old invalid who hobbled with a prominent and often painful limp. His left leg was two inches shorter with atrophied muscles and diminished range of motion. After the war, this severe injury would qualify him for a pension of \$6 per month that would later be increased to \$12 a month.

Pvt. James Pinion, the father of Theophilus, was also honorably discharged and appeared to have been released sometime after October 1865. He had lived in Timbuctoo 12 years prior to the war with his first wife, Sarah (or Francis) Wilson, and their family. James was a minister and one of the founders of Zion Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal African Church of Timbuctoo in 1854.<sup>2</sup>

The Civil War could shatter families. Sadly, after Theophilus returned home, it would be the last time he would ever see his mother. His father and mother had separated at the end of the war and both moved away from Timbuctoo. Divorce was not an option for poor African Americans who did not have the money or often the records for proof of marriage. In fact, her whereabouts caused great problems for James's widowed second wife when she applied for a pension. Pension agents could not discover if Theophilus's mother had died, a requirement for obtaining a pension.

After the war, Theophilus had to rely on jobs that offered light work because of his injuries. He was a carter and servant at the Mount Holly Washington Hotel. He married three times and appeared to never have had children. His first wife was Abigail Ann (Brown) who died at age 36 in Timbuctoo on November 5, 1886.<sup>3</sup> His second wife was Annie (Washington) who died at age 35 on April 3, 1895. Both wives were buried in the Timbuctoo Cemetery. His third wife was Margaret C. (Jones) who had lived in Timbuctoo with him until his death on December 14, 1904 at age 57 from paralysis. As a 34-year-old widow, Margaret appeared to have obtained a pension because she was able to prove with vital statistic records that the other wives were deceased before her marriage to Theophilus on January 7, 1903.



**Figure 1. Part of the Surgeon's Certificate showing locations of scars on Theophilus Pinion (Co. I 29th Connecticut Infantry Colored) who was severely wounded by a missile near Kell House, VA on Oct 27, 1864. (*Theophilus Pinion Pension File*)**

The Surgeon's Certificate shown in Figure 2 included outlines of the human skeleton and figure on which the surgeon was instructed to indicate the location of, in this case, "entrance and exit of a missile". The Surgeon's Certificate was written up after an examination of the pension claim candidate and then sent to the Pension Office.

### General References

*Theophilus W. Pinion Pension File application # 97271*, pp. copies, *Compiled Military Records*, microfilm (National Archives, Washington, D.C.)

Schroeder-Lein, Glenna R., *The Encyclopedia of Civil War Medicine* (Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2008)

### Citations

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<sup>1</sup> Schroeder-Lein 2008, pp. 16, 120

<sup>2</sup> Burlington County, *Deed Book E-6*, p. 256 (Burlington County Courthouse)

<sup>3</sup> *New Jersey Mirror*, Nov 17, 1886, p. 2 (microfilm, Burlington County Library)