

## An Oriental Yankee Soldier

Joseph Pierce was worth six dollars in 1852. It was a time when his country, China, was plagued by civil war and famine. Starving families took desperate measures to get money and food. In the port city of Canton, the 10-year-old boy's father sold him to New England sea captain Amos Peck.

During the two-month voyage to the United States, the ship's crew nicknamed the boy "Joe." When he arrived in Hartford, Connecticut, to live with the Peck family, he was given the surname Pierce. Joseph Pierce, though technically a slave, was apparently treated as part of the family; he played with the Peck children and went to school with them.

A decade later and a year after the Civil War's start, Pierce joined the 14th Connecticut Infantry as a private. He became probably the only Chinese soldier in the Army of the Potomac. Three weeks after mustering in, at the Battle of Antietam, Maryland, the fledgling regiment joined the charge on the Confederate line at the Sunken Road. It lost 137 men. Just one year later, after fighting at Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, the regiment had only 105 men left of the 1,015 recruits that had departed from Connecticut.

In 1864 Pierce, then a corporal, fought with the 14th in Virginia. The regiment lost many men. Despite replacements, by the beginning of 1865 the muster roll showed only 180 names. By the war's end the 14th had lost more men than any other Connecticut regiment.

After the war Pierce returned to his home state and settled in Meriden. He began a successful career as an engraver in the city's thriving silver industry. In 1876 he married a Martha Morgan and had three children. He lived and worked in Meriden until 1914. When he died two years later, an obituary in the local newspaper made no mention of his unusual background and stated simply and appropriately: he was "well known and liked."



**Name:** Joseph Pierce

**Dates:** 1842 (?) to 1916

**Allegiance:** Union

**Rank:** Corporal

**Unit:** 14th Connecticut Infantry, Company F

**Service Record:** 1862 — mustered into the army as a private on August 23. 1863 — promoted to corporal in November. 1865 — mustered out with his regiment on May 31.

**Submitted by John M. Archer  
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