

## CHAPTER 3

### **Oswego County Answering the Call – The 24<sup>th</sup> NYSV Infantry**

Almost immediately after the attack on Fort Sumter a meeting was held in Oswego, New York to form a regiment in response to President Abraham Lincoln's call for 75,000 men. Recruitment moved quickly and various companies were put together to form the NYS 24<sup>th</sup> Volunteer Infantry.<sup>25,32,34</sup> As stated by Lewis Benedict<sup>3</sup>, NYS 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Company H (same company as Stephen and Charles Scriber), in his May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1861 letter home, the unit initially left Fulton, NY in May of 1861 via train and spent one night in Geneva, NY. The next day they traveled south on Seneca Lake via steamboat to Watkins (Glen), then arrived at Elmira after dark.<sup>34</sup> Hotels were full so the recruits went to a local church where they slept amid much confusion and noise. When they initially arrived at Elmira the barracks had not been completed, but soon they moved into roughly made barracks (Barracks #4) situated near the river located about a mile outside the center of the city. Here they set up encampments where they lived in the "shanty's"<sup>34,51</sup> near the Chemung River for a few weeks. Apparently not everyone in Co. H of the 24<sup>th</sup> NYSV infantry was anxious to go into battle. In a June 20, 1861 letter<sup>14,60</sup> Captain Albert Taylor described the capture of private George Wilcox while attempting to desert, and also his confinement in the guard house with rations of only bread and water. Interestingly, although there is mention in this letter that he would be "drummed out" of camp, records show that private Wilcox was eventually mustered out with his unit in May of 1863, then participated in subsequent service in Company A of the 15<sup>th</sup> Calvary.<sup>30</sup> John R. Young of Company H, and a boyhood friend of Stephen and Charles Scriber, wrote in a letter (May 24, 1861) to Maria Van Wagoner of Fulton, NY that both Stephen and

Charles had been quite sick with the measles.<sup>66</sup> Charles was recovering in the hospital and Stephen was staying with the Dewitts, an Elmira family. Stephen returned to Elmira after the war in 1865 and went into business with William Dewitt for a year and a half.<sup>44</sup>



**Elmira Military Rendezvous, NY Civil War Monument (Water Street)**



**Marker at border East End of Elmira Barracks and Prison Camp**

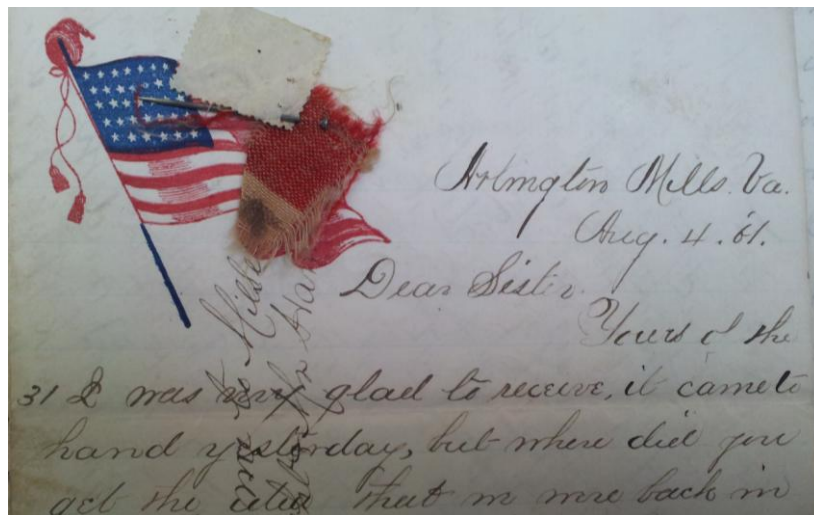
After leaving Elmira in July of 1861, this unit went to Washington, D.C. and to Virginia where they served in the defenses of Washington, D.C. until March of 1862. The regiment arrived in Washington, via Harrisburg and Baltimore, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July. In a July 8, 1861 letter to his childhood neighbor, Ritie Van Wagonen, Charles Scriber described the train trip to D.C.<sup>66</sup> He was very impressed with the supper the “pretty” women from Williamsport, Pa. prepared for the soldiers when they stopped there, as well as the waving “stars and stripes” and kerchiefs along the way.<sup>66</sup> He also mentioned

visiting the President's home, the Capitol, and the US Patent Office shortly after arriving in the city. Soon after arriving the 24<sup>th</sup> camped on Meridian Hill till July 21<sup>st</sup>, and on that day received long Enfield rifles in exchange for the percussion muskets with which it had left the State. The unit moved to Arlington Mills, Va on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, threw up breastworks and remained until the 28<sup>th</sup> of September, when it united with the advance to Upton's Hill, and there camped during the winter of 1861 and 1862.<sup>32</sup>

In the fall of 1861 the regiment was quickly given a taste of war's realities at their camp across the Potomac River from Washington, DC.<sup>18,51</sup> This Oswego county regiment split time between constructing their camp for winter and drilling as soldiers. Dysentery and other sicknesses were noted in the camp. The 24<sup>th</sup> NYS Infantry was called out to the front to cover the Union's retreat (the "Great Skedaddle") from First Bull Run (Manassas) on July 22<sup>nd</sup>. Here they held that picket line and provided the only organized force between the victorious Confederates and Washington, D.C. for about three weeks.<sup>32,34</sup> They did this without tents, blankets, or other baggage. In an August 4, 1861 letter home John R. Young mentioned the fact that the unit was assigned as the "advance guard" and had been sleeping on the ground during that period.<sup>66</sup> He had spent one week with the unit, then returned to the city to "oversee the belongings of the 24<sup>th</sup>".<sup>66</sup> It may have been fortunate that the Rebels were also disorganized early in the war and did not follow up their victory at First Manassas.<sup>31</sup>

In another letter (August 15, 1861) John Young noted the unit had been ordered back to the Arlington House which was General Keyes' headquarters.<sup>66</sup> In the same letter he described shooting a rebel while on picket duty. He wrote to Maria Van Wagoner "I

used to think I could never shoot a man and although it is very cruel, it must be done".<sup>66</sup> During the late summer of 1861, various letters from soldiers of the 24<sup>th</sup> mentioned they were encamped on the land belonging to rebel general Robert E. Lee (Arlington Heights, VA).<sup>2,48,60</sup> Colonel Samuel Beardsley stated in one letter that they were encamped on Robert E. Lee's property and that when Lee's family left, they appeared to take a few family pictures and little else. They even left the slaves.<sup>2</sup> George Smith's (Company K) letter<sup>48</sup> mentioned that some men went up in a balloon (Intrepid?) and were shot at with cannon balls but not hit. Another soldier (Byron Strong, Company B) from the 24<sup>th</sup> NYSV Infantry attached a piece of an American flag to a letter home to his sister. This 'relic' was given to him by an artillery soldier retreating from Manassas to Washington after the 1<sup>st</sup> Bull Run defeat.<sup>60</sup>



**Copy of portion of letter from Byron Strong**  
(with piece of flag tattered in First Bull Run (Manassas) attached)<sup>60</sup>

In his newspaper accounts written approximately 25 years after the end of the war, Stephen E. Chandler mentioned supplies for this 3-week duty were to a large extent what people were willing to give them, what they could 'find', and peaches from a

nearby orchard at Morton's Hill.<sup>9</sup> From here the regiment marched on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of July to Bailey's Crossroads, in Virginia, about eight miles from Washington; it lay there one week. From thence it fell back to Arlington Mills, here it was relieved by the 25<sup>th</sup> New York (Infantry), and went into camp about two miles in the rear of Arlington Mills, at a place called Camp Sullivan. It remained there two or three weeks.<sup>9</sup>



**Stephen E. Chandler, 24<sup>th</sup> NYSV, Co. E,** later served in 24<sup>th</sup> NYS Calvary and awarded the Medal of Honor in 1898 (Photo Courtesy of Historical Data Systems)

Soon after the regiment went to Arlington House on the banks of the Potomac and encamped, and near the end of September, they started for Upton Hill, where they remained through the winter.<sup>32</sup> When the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry returned from their assigned picket duties in August, the soldiers erected "Fort Upton" (at Upton's or Throgmorton's Hill outside of Washington DC in Arlington and near Alexandria, Va.). There they encamped for the winter of 1861-62. When stationed for picket duty a few miles to the south the soldiers could observe Confederate troops drilling and carrying out dress parade. Letters from John R. Young and Charles Scriber sent to Maria Van Wagoner in 1861-62 they indicated they were somewhat bored with Army life.<sup>65</sup> At one point during this time period President Abraham Lincoln and his entire Cabinet, including Secretary of State

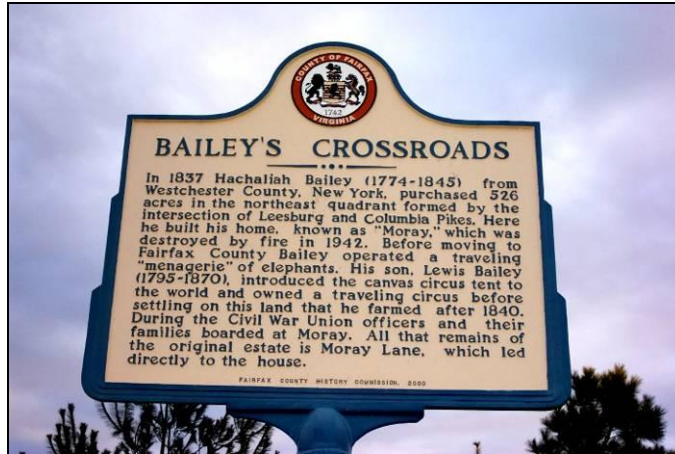


William Seward, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, and General George McClelland visited their encampment to review their brigade.<sup>9,25</sup> Charles Scriber wrote a September 20, 1861 letter to Ritie Van Wagonen from Arlington that described problems his brother Stephen had with Captain Albert Taylor.<sup>66</sup> Apparently since the time Stephen was sick in Elmira the two had “not been on friendly terms and the captain had been looking for a chance to reduce him.” After Stephen’s men took “too large a circle while wheeling” during a drill, the captain threatened to replace him. Stephen told him to “go ahead”. Stephen was court martialed and reduced at that time.<sup>66</sup> Apparently, Stephen returned shortly to his original position.

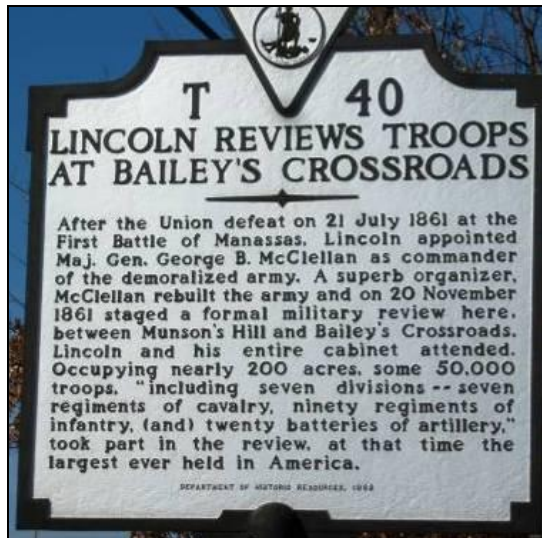
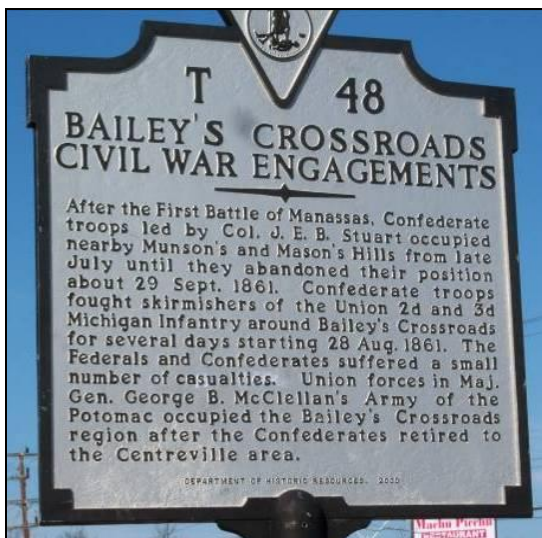


**Arlington House (Pre-Civil War home of Robert E. Lee)**

Many soldiers, including the 24<sup>th</sup> NYSV Infantry, encamped on this property and nearby Arlington, VA for some of the early part of the Civil War



Site of 24<sup>th</sup> NYS Infantry's first "Engagement"<sup>36</sup>, July 25, 1861, From Wikipedia

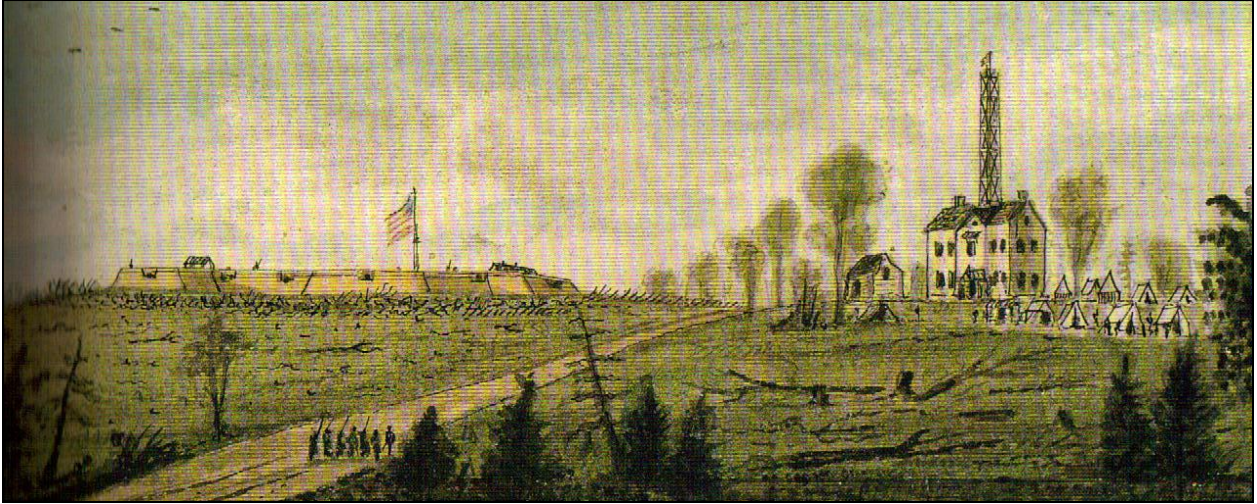


Historical Markers, Bailey's Crossroads, Va



Current Picture (Upton Hill, Va)





**Fort Ramsey at Upton's Hill, Va**

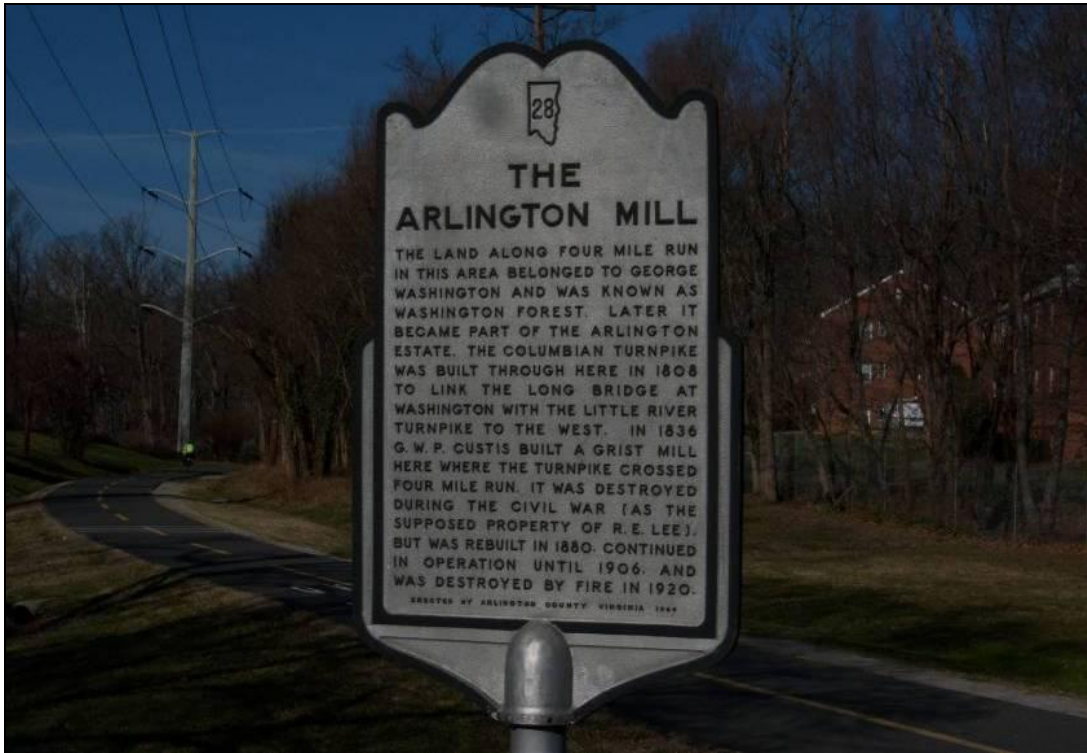
(March 2, 1862) and Observatory for US Signal Corps at Forney's House.  
 The 24<sup>th</sup> NYSV Infantry spent the winter of 1861-62 in this area.  
 From Images of the Storm (Snedden)



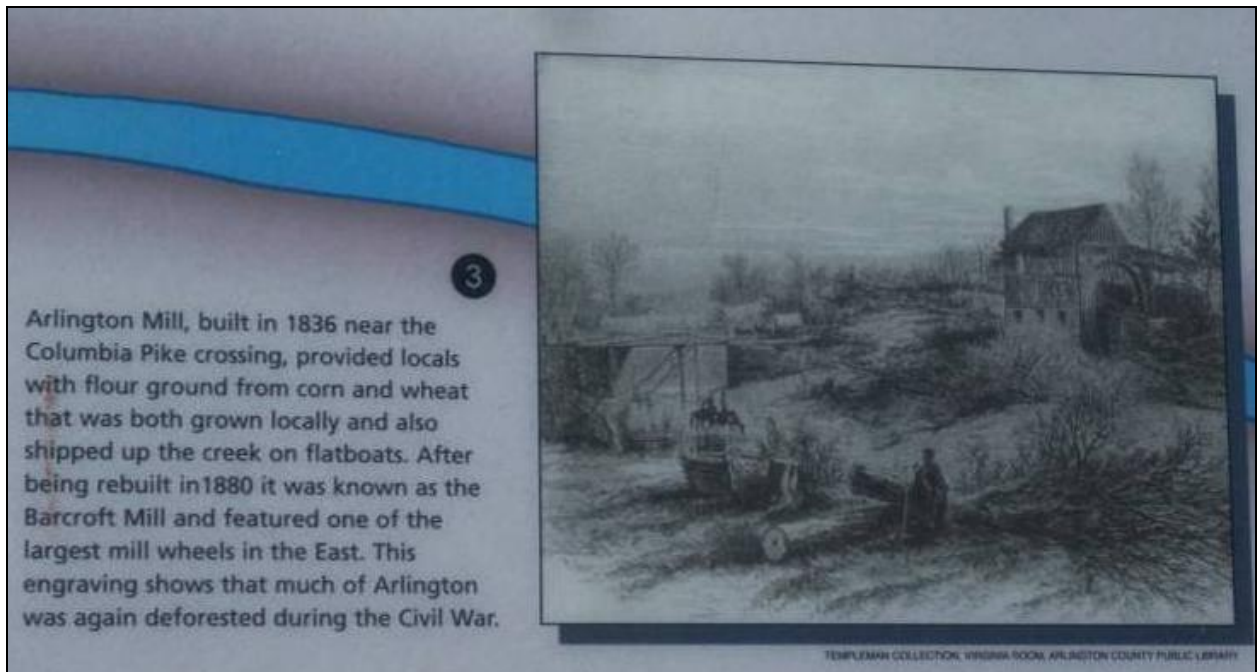
**The Falls Church at Falls Church, Va**

Near site of early engagement (October 8, 1861) of 24<sup>th</sup> NYSV Infantry<sup>36</sup>





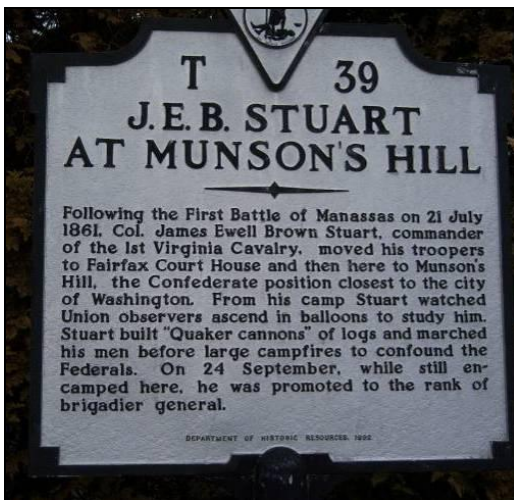
**Historical Signs, Arlington Mills, Va.** (24<sup>th</sup> NYSV Infantry was briefly encamped here in 1861)





**Munson's Hill and Bailey's Crossroads, The Advanced Post of the Rebel Army on the Potomac (Harper's Weekly, October 5, 1861)**

<http://www.sonofthesouth.net/leefoundation/civil-war/1861/october/baileys-cross-roads.htm>



**Munson's Hill Today (Munson's Hill Towers)**  
 Rebel forces encamped here and could be seen by Union soldiers from Upton's Hill (1861-62)

After spending the winter in camp, the regiment marched southward in Virginia to Falmouth and Fredericksburg during the spring.<sup>32</sup> In March, 1862, they were ordered to join the grand army, and went into Centerville from whence the rebels had retreated; laid in camp there a week, and were ordered back to Alexandria where they encamped.



**Union Soldiers Outside Washington D.C.** (early 1862)<sup>22</sup>

They stayed there until the latter part of April, when they went to Bristow Station with the First Army Corps, there they remained 5 or 6 days. Next they moved from there to Catlett's Station, where they remained another 4 days; then advanced on Fredericksburg in May, 1862. A lively skirmish ensued, in which the brigade was engaged, called the Battle of Falmouth. They remained encamped at Falmouth for several weeks until Stonewall Jackson made a raid down the Shenandoah Valley. At that time they were ordered up the valley and went as far as Front Royal.<sup>32</sup> In a May 1862 letter from camp in Falmouth, Charles Scriber mentions that he was a “provost guard” and they were watching over 73 prisoners.<sup>66</sup> He also mentioned that “President Lincoln has been here for three days reviewing the troops and he seems well pleased with their appearance”.<sup>66</sup>



The 24<sup>th</sup> then fell back from Front Royal to New Market, and remained 2 or 3 days; then moved to Warrenton, remaining 3 or 4 days; moved from Warrenton back to Falmouth, and remained there until the first of August. Then they made a reconnaissance to Spotsylvania Court House, while the cavalry destroyed the Virginia Central Railroad at Fredericks Hall Station. The 24<sup>th</sup> then returned to Falmouth in 2 days. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, 1862, they left for Cedar Mountain, or as it is sometimes called Slaughter Mountain, remained in camp there 2 days; thence fell back to Rappahannock Station or bridge. They stayed there 4 days under artillery fire, and only had one man killed from Company D.<sup>32</sup> Their numerous long marches during the Pennisular Campaign under General McClelland earned them the initial name of “Iron Brigade.”<sup>34</sup> In an April 22, 1862 letter home, Byron Strong (Co. B) mentions the Iron Brigade designation.<sup>60</sup> The 24<sup>th</sup> was among those assigned to guard the Rappahannock River and at one point could not cross because the Confederates burned a bridge.<sup>21</sup> When McClelland was unsuccessful in his campaign to take Richmond, President Lincoln replaced him with John Pope.