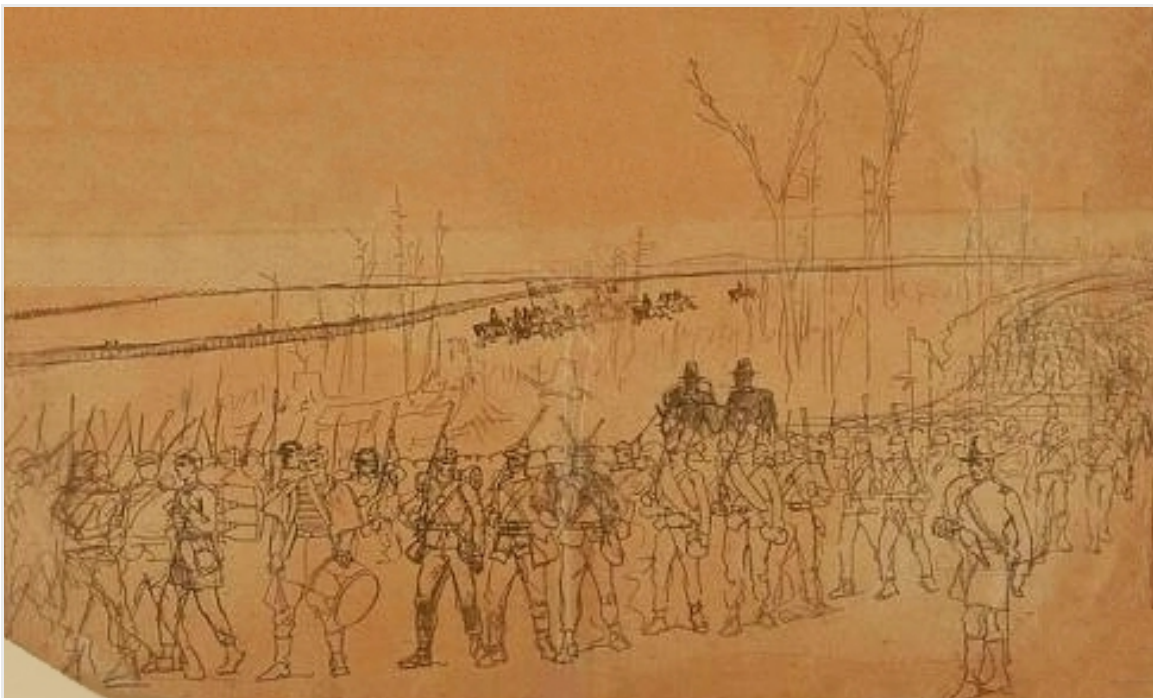

169th New York Infantry Newsletter

June 2013

The Time Traveler.

Part V.

The lifting of the Confederate siege at Suffolk would find the 169th N.Y. fortifying the garrison's defenses, dismantling the Petersburg railroad all the way to the Blackwater River, and clearing out the Confederate guerrillas in the area. When the Union Army decided to abandon Suffolk because it was too costly to hold, the regiment would be sent to reconnoiter the Peninsula as the Army of Northern Virginia invaded Pennsylvania.



Marching Infantry Column (1862)

Winslow Homer (1836-1910)

Collection of the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, New York

May 1st, 1863, would begin with the news that Col. Buel's hand would not have to be amputated as a result of the severe injuries sustained from an exploding shell on the Edenton Road. The colonel would be sent to Washington to convalesce for several weeks before returning to Troy to recover his strength.

Unbeknownst to the Union forces at Suffolk, Confederate Gen. Longstreet had just received orders from Lee the day before to withdraw his forces and speedily proceed to Chancellorsville, where the Army of Northern Virginia was engaged in a great battle with the Army of the Potomac. But before the Rebels would



**Advance of the Union infantry and artillery along Providence Church Road, May 3, 1863
Corporal Thomas Place, 1st N.Y. Mounted Rifles (ca. 1839 - N.D.)
Collection of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia**

The Union column is seen advancing on the road across the center of the drawing, facing the woods beyond a field, puffs of smoke revealing artillery positions on both sides.

leave Suffolk, there would be one last probe by Maj.-Gen. Peck's forces on May 3^d in which the 169th and 13th Indiana would serve as a reserve force.

The main attack by the Union forces, made with four infantry regiments supported by cavalry and artillery, crossed the Nansemond River and proceeded north on the Providence Church Road. Encountering Confederate rifle and cannon fire, the Yankees confronted the Greybacks, who manned their first line of entrenchments in the woods ahead.

Taking what little cover they could behind a rail fence situated 400 yards across a field from the Confederate line, the Union troops received orders to charge the fortified Confederate positions. Their columns advanced under a fusillade of shot and shell, taking the first line of trenches while the Confederates retreated further into the woods. The Rebels rallied but failed in an attempt to retake their line. The Union soldiers held firm, forcing the Rebels to retreat to a second line of entrenchments. For the next two hours, both sides held their positions, with sharpshooters dealing in a deadly trade of minié balls until Peck ordered the withdrawal of his forces.

The men of the 169th would have preferred to participate in the fighting, a common sentiment among volunteer troops in any war. Their élan was described in a letter to the *Troy Daily Whig* by Priv. Theodore Schutt, Co. A:

"Yesterday (Sunday), forces were thrown over the Nansemond in front of and below Suffolk. Those below crossed on pontoons, while those in front were passed over the bridge opposite this place, which, though partially destroyed, had been so far repaired that an hour's work sufficed to render it staunch and safe for the passage of our artillery and infantry. Only two or three regiments and a few pieces of artillery engaged the enemy, who was strongly posted in rifle pits and in the



Confederate Sharpshooter

woods, his sharp-shooters occupying the front, and ensconced in tree-tops and cunningly-devised pits, annoyed our skirmishers, and succeeded in killing and wounding many before they could be dislodged.

"The 169th was called out, provided with two days' rations. The boys responded promptly to the summons, and evinced an eager disposition to have another brush with the rebels. The affair on the Edenton road, although it proved a severe ordeal for their first experience under fire, had in no wise dampened their ardor, and their commendable conduct on the 3^d inst., must have been a source of the highest gratification to the officers, who have now the most indubitable proof that their men can be relied upon. This regiment, however, in conjunction with the 13th Indiana, known here as the 'fighting regiment,' were held in reserve on this side of the Nansemond. Desultory fighting continued all day on the opposite side of the river, resulting decidedly in our favor, our forces driving the rebels from their fastnesses in the woods, ascertaining their position and probable intention of offering us battle. But they evinced no disposition to come out and fight us manfully, and at night-fall our troops were withdrawn, in front, and the plank again removed from the bridge, while the 169th, or a portion of them, were posted in rifle-pits to the left of the bridge, and the remainder lay down in the open air to await the events of the night.

"Nothing transpired during the night, however, and we were all looking forward to the morrow, in expectation that a severe battle would be fought. In this we were disappointed. Everything looked unusually quiet and serene in the morning – not a reb to be seen, not a gun fired."

Priv. William H. Merriam, Co. H, the former reporter with the New York *Herald*, also wrote of the enthusiasm of the men of the 169th: "As is its custom, the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth came speedily and willingly under arms, and though in reserve its bearing was patient, affable and gentle, and its reputation here fully warrants the belief that it would have considered it a favor to cross the river with its gallant confrères from noble Indiana."

While such sentiments may have gone over well with the public back home, and surely represented that of many of the men, Sergt. George M. Whitcomb, Co. D, expressed a feeling of relief at avoiding combat in a letter to his parents:

"To-day has been all quiet around here, but last Sunday we left camp at six in the morning and we marched down into Suffolk, and expected enemy movement such that we should have to march across the river and encounter the enemy. But you see that God was on our side then and we were not called on at all, and about dark we halted up in line and layed in the rifle pits all night and until about ten Monday morning, and then it was all over and we went back to camp alright, and no one was hurt at all, and this week we haven't seen any Rebels at all."

In writing to his sister, Priv. Alfred Carmon, Co. H, apparently agreed with Sergt. Whitcomb's position: "We were called out in line yesterday morning, about six o'clock in the morning, and marched down in the city, where we laid all day, expecting to get orders to cross the river, but they did not come, and I am glad that they did not, because they had a pretty hard fight over there. They kept a bringing in the killed and wounded."

And though the 169th escaped injury that day, Lieut.-Col. John McConihe wrote of the death and suffering of other Union regiments in a letter to his friends in Cincinnati:

"Saturday night, we were called out to repel an expected assault, but, no enemy appearing, we retired to our blankets. The moon shone brightly and the night was like unto day. 'Twas midnight, and the bright bayonets glistened in the silvery rays of the shining moon. The guns of the fort shook the earth with their sullen boom, and the otherwise stillness of the night was made beautiful by the sweet notes of a whip-o-will, whistling from a tree not far distant. The scene was a grand one, and I wondered how a people could think even of making night hideous by the clash and roar of battle, when all nature seemed so harmonious and lovely. But the Greybacks are demented; they see no beauty in the workings of our harmonious and lovely Constitution, or our beautiful Banner, with its quiet constellation of stars, and how could we expect them to appreciate the workings of nature?"

"Sunday morning, we moved down to the crossing of the Nansemond, towards Petersburg, and remained there all day as a reserve, while others crossed and fought the enemy. At night they returned, the bridge was taken up again, and the 169th lay in the rifle-pits there all night. No Rebels appeared, and we were wearied only by constant watching. During the day, as we stood by the roadside, the procession of killed and wounded continued to move by us, and all was silent, save the occasional groan of a suffering hero. Captain Buswell's lifeless form excited my liveliest sympathy, and as I gazed upon his fair, placid face, with its intelligent look, and scanned his symmetry and neatness, I thought of his friends and relatives made mournful, back in the old 'Granite State.' I could imagine I heard their earnest prayers, as they bowed in meek submission in the old family pew at home while he was giving up his breath on the altar of his country, 'Oh God, preserve our



Capt. Lewis H. Buzzell, 13th N.H.



Col. Benjamin Ringold, 103^d N.Y.

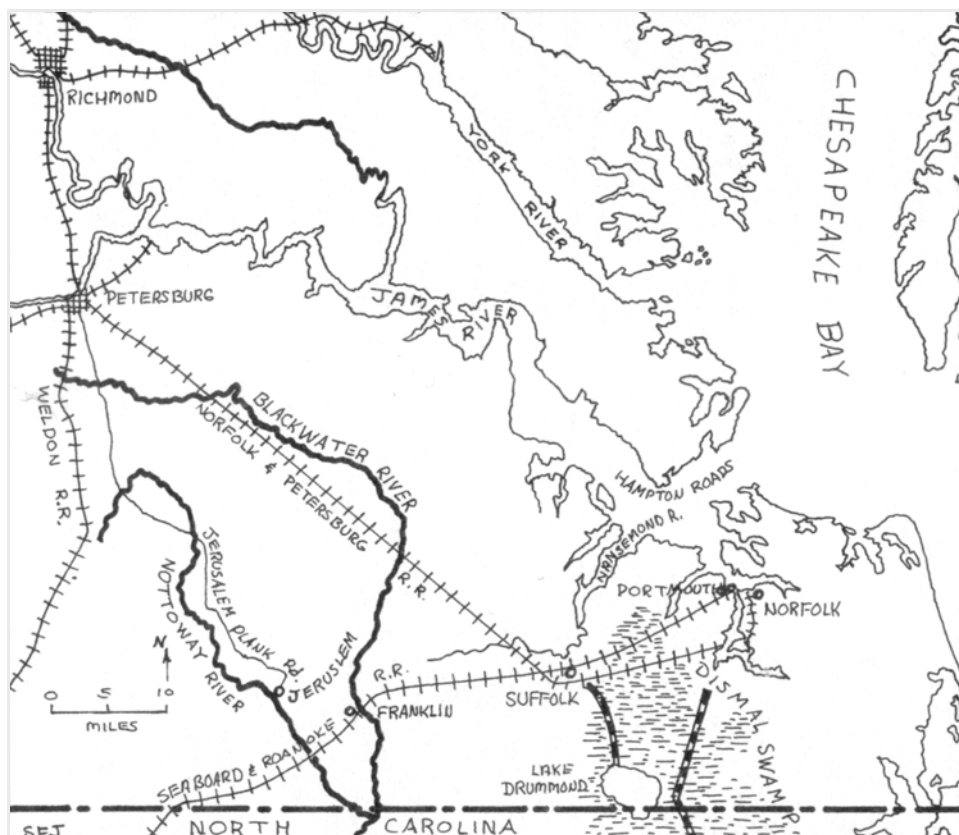
son from injury, and let him soon return to his afflicted parents.' But alas, even while they interceded for him, his Maker had claimed him, as his own, and his young spirit had fled to Eternity. 'Truly,' I exclaimed, 'death loves a shining mark.' Colonel Ringold of the 103^d was borne along, and he groaned in the agonies of a mortal wound. His pale face and haggard look indicated his terrible suffering, but the beauty that shone on the captain's face rested not on the colonel's. We lost something like one hundred killed and wounded in this Sunday's work."



The evening of the 3^d would see the withdrawal from Suffolk by Longstreet's Corps, the Confederate troops marching silently along preplanned routes to the Blackwater. Trees along the roads had been partially cut in advance so that they could be felled with ease, hindering any potential Union pursuit. Longstreet burned the bridges leaving a sufficient force to hold their line on the river.

Alerted by two Rebel deserters of what was transpiring, Peck sent the 1st N.Y. Mounted Infantry in pursuit of the Greybacks, but most of Longstreet's forces had safely evacuated, out of reach of Union forces. About 200 soldiers of the Confederate rearguard would be captured and taken prisoner. 1st Lieut. and Adj't William E. Kisselburgh announced the end of the siege in a letter to the *Troy Daily Times*:

"The siege of Suffolk has at last been raised, and the enemy has taken to his legs and run away... After the object of the reconnaissance had



Map of Southeastern Virginia
 Published in "The Siege of Suffolk - The Forgotten Campaign, April 11 - May 4, 1863" (1989)

been gained, the troops re-crossed the river at about 10 o'clock at night; little expecting that before the dawn of the following day the rebels would beat a hasty and disgraceful retreat. The One Hundred and Sixty-ninth lay in the rifle-pits all the night, and at 4 A. M. was ordered with three days' rations to march at 6 A. M. The rations were prepared and orders awaited; but in consideration, I suppose, of the fact that our regiment had been constantly under arms for thirty-six hours, we were permitted to return to camp and enjoy a season of repose. Other troops, however, were sent out after the retreating rebels, and all day long prisoners kept coming in by scores and singles, until upwards of 200 greybacks had been sent in. From officers who accompanied the expedition I learn that only the cavalry came up with the rear guard of the enemy, capturing that, and such others as had straggled behind or deserted from the rebel ranks. A good many deserters came in. The rebel fortifications are described as elegant and elaborate defences, - the one on the Edenton road, in the attack on which Col. Buel was wounded, being particularly strong and well-built."

Priv. Merriam reported on the appearance of the prisoners: "All day long, in company with Capt. Nat. Wood, Lieutenants Cary and Charles Douglas Merrill, I have been sitting in my easy chair, just outside of my 'A' tent, looking at the rebel prisoners brought in by our gallant captors. Former reports at their wasted and destitute appearance do not belie them. Just at this point of my letter, Sergeant Robert Rainsbury, of Company I, informs me that five hundred additional prisoners are in sight on the main road."



Priv. Schutt would express his doubts, however, concerning his comrade's report of starvation within the Confederate ranks:

"At 3 o'clock Gen. Corcoran, with a large force of cavalry, artillery and infantry, started out on the Somerton road after the retreating rebels. Had this force been advanced an hour or two earlier, the results would have been almost incalculable in their effect upon the enemy. As it is we are doing them immense damage, capturing their stores, burning the houses and barns, which have so long furnished a friendly covert for their sharpshooters, while a continuous stream of prisoners is passing our camp, in squads of from four to twenty. Some three or four hundred have already been brought in, and a more ragged, dirty, uncouth, forlorn set of mortals, I never beheld. Those who evince a disposition to be communicative, complain that for the last three days no rations whatever have been issued to them, and that the entire army which has been threatening our front for the past three or four weeks, was reduced to the verge of starvation. I am induced to doubt the sincerity of these assertions somewhat, for it is known that the whole section of the country through which Longstreet passed, in his attempt to capture Suffolk and Norfolk, was richly stored with produce of all kinds – the Federal Army, since its occupation of this country, having afforded to the rebel sympathizers that protection and immunity from loss, which has ever characterized its possession of rebel territory; and, as a consequence of this policy, the enemy has reaped the benefits of last year's harvest.



Return of a Foraging Party to Philippi, Virginia
 Published in "Harper's Weekly" (August 17th, 1861)

"Every conceivable species of property is being brought in this afternoon. Secesh horses, wagons, carts, mules, &c. Some of the returned cavalymen have chairs attached to their saddles; others exhibit specimens of crockery, bed blankets, and other what-nots. I noticed one lieutenant of infantry driving in a good-looking donkey, to which was attached a sort of nondescript vehicle, which we, at North, would style a 'go-cart,' captured from some luckless rebel, and his singular turnout excited bursts of laughter, as he came into town on the Somerton road, plying a stout cudgel to his not over-ambitious steed."

Priv. Carmon's estimate of the number of captured Rebels was a bit more in line with Adj't. Kisselburgh's figure, but regardless of the number, the war was over for these men. Their comrades, including Gen. Pickett's division, who had fought against the 169th on the Edenton Road on April 24th, would soon meet their destiny on the battlefield at Gettysburg, the high-water mark of the Confederacy, known to history as Pickett's Charge:

"At dark, they stopped fighting and all of the forces were brought on this side of the river, and our regiment had to lay in the rifle pits all night. But there was not much need of that, because the Rebels retreated last night, and our troops started out after them this morning at three o'clock, but they traveled too fast for them and they got across the Blackwater and burned the bridge. They have retreated about twenty-five miles and are still a going. We captured about 150 prisoners. They said that they were a going to Richmond to reinforce old 'Stonewall,' for Hooker is a driving them pretty hard down there.

"The boys that were out on the pursuit yesterday acted pretty tired when they came in last night. Some of them had chickens hung on their guns. Some of them had turkeys. They burned everything 'slick and clean' as they went."



Confederate Defensive Works

In a follow-up letter to the *Daily Whig*, Priv. Schutt described the "impregnable fortifications" built by the Confederates at Suffolk, ominously stating that if an attack scheduled for Monday the 4th had occurred as planned, the assaulting Union infantry columns would have been "mown down as grass before the husbandman's scythe."

"Since the rebel retreat from this vicinity, we have learned that their stay here was characterized by the most untiring diligence and industry. They have left some really wonderful monuments of their tact, skill, and assiduity in the construction of field fortifications. On the Edenton, Somerton, South Quay and Providence Church roads, their works were not only of the strongest nature, but considerable attention had been given to the smallest details incident to the presumed perfection of such fortifications – as in the wicker work for the embrasures, the abatis in front, detached rifle-pits, &c. It was evidently their intention, if possible, to draw us out, to be mown down before these almost impregnable works of imaginary skill, as grass before the husbandman's scythe. And I have no doubt if the enemy's retreat had not commenced at the hour it did, we should have gratified their desire in this respect, as it is now known that on Monday morning, we were to make a combined attack upon the rebel front, by the four roads above-named, and it is a very fair presumption that we should have been terribly cut-up before carrying the four strong positions they occupied on three sides of us.

"Large numbers of men are daily detailed from the different regiments encamped here, for the destruction and rasure of the rebel's handiwork, and their imposing lines of offensive and defensive works are fast melting away before the fire, axe and spade employed by our brave boys in effecting their demolition.

"As usual, the rebs left behind, affixed to trees and in other prominent places, many taunting messages and characteristic eruptions in the shape of braggadocio, for the perusal and meditation of our Generals, officers and privates, some of which are as follows, and of similar purport: 'To the General commanding at Suffolk: – Follow us if you dare!' 'Receive our Legacy – *Lice*.' 'You shall see us again soon.' 'How do you like the Louisiana Tigers?' etc., etc."

Col. McConihe rode his charger out to the Rebel siege lines the following day, commenting in a letter about the scenes of destruction surrounding him:

"The Rebels have gone, and we can now wander beyond our breast-works, and through the woods and fields without danger. Yesterday, I rode out to our battleground on the Edenton road, and through the works of the enemy. They were formidable beyond conception – well-engineered and strongly built. They must have worked like beavers and been very numerous to construct such fortifications in the space of three weeks. I was astonished, and thank our fortune we were not ordered to charge on those works, for if we had, few of us would have been left to tell the tale of that day. Skill and energy were fully exhibited. They had selected a most admirable position, and they could not be driven from it, except by shelling them out. The woods around bore evidences of the flying missiles on that day, and it must have been warm for the Rebels.



"On all the roads diverging from this place and through the country around, the effects of this contest are self-evident. '*Bella, horrida bella!*' you would exclaim, if you could but view the smoldering ruins of the once palatial residences, which can be met with in all directions. Long avenues, with their fallen fir trees, lead to the blackened chimneys, which still rear their forms high above the desolation around. The family carriage stood in the barn, where now you see cinders, a few bolts, and four tires. The fences strew the road and fields, and the farm is known from the meadow only by its additional desolation, it not yet being reclaimed by nature – no grasses growing, or flowers bloom-



Ruined Dwelling, Town in Distance (ca. 1860-'65)
Alfred Rudolph Waud (1828-1891)
Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

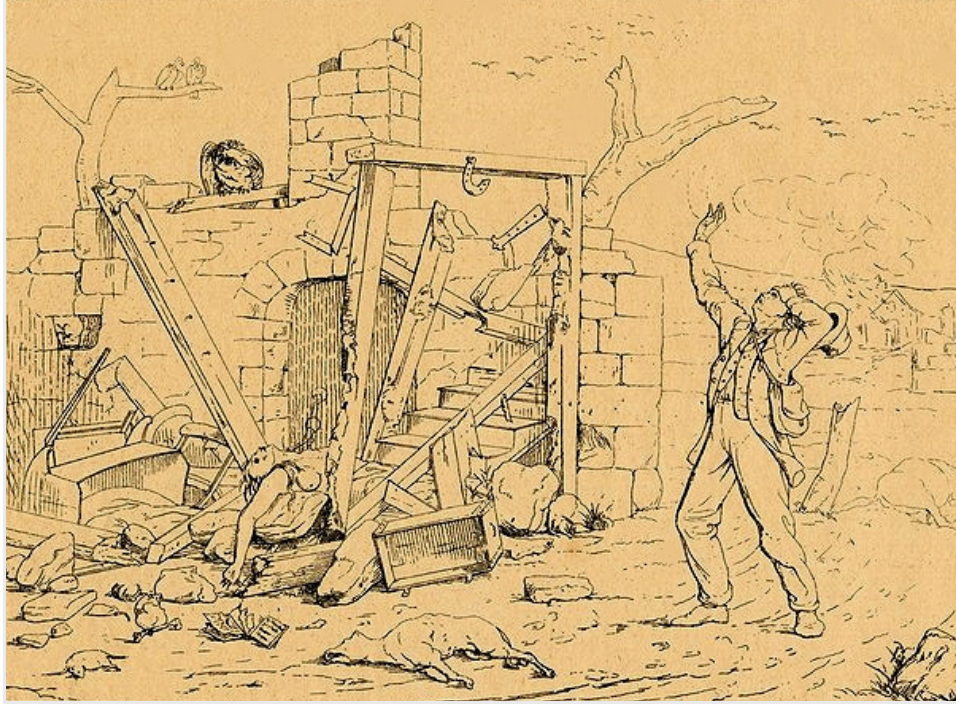
ing on these deserted lands. Their owners have fled, leaving the plough for the sword in their madness, and their path is lighted by their burning mansions.

"Oh, it looked lonely as I gazed upon these ruins, and it seemed as if the air itself was filled with demons incarnate. I thought of 'Pip,' when the convict suddenly astonished his nerves by placing him astride the tombstone down in the black moor, and conjectured what my feelings would be if some demonical Rebel should spring from those ruins, and fling me unceremoniously into that opening above, in the chimney (which opening had probably been a fireplace when the room surrounded it,) and then smoke me like a ham in a smokehouse from a fire in the place below, called in other days the kitchen fireplace. The very idea caused me to turn my horse around and gallop away, down through the fallen trees, leaping over their green branches and emerging on the road.

"Suffolk must have been a beautiful place before the war, and the abundant evidences throughout this whole region are ample to prove the happiness, comfort, and prosperity of all, and the luxury and wealth of many. Beautiful shade trees line the main street, with a row down its center, and the residences evince taste and neatness. But they are nearly all deserted now. Some are occupied by officers, and some look vacant; the blinds and doors are constantly closed, yet they are not vacant. Occasionally, there emerges a determinedly sour and impudently ugly-looking female, and even if they don't show themselves, you can know that such beings exist inside, by seeing the blacks gathered around the gate or in the yard.

"The churches and public buildings are used for hospitals or other purposes; the shade trees are being 'barked' by officers' horses, or the heavy wheels of wagons and artillery. Many houses have been leveled on the riverbank, to give range to our cannons.

"One old, bitter 'Sesesh' complained to the general that the soldiers were annoying him by carrying away his firewood and other little things (which he would most willingly have carried to the Rebel fires himself) and he wished it stopped. This was just over the Nansemond,



Tracks of the Armies (1863)
Adalbert J. Volck (1828-1912)

Collection of the New-York Historical Society, New York

and the next day the Rebels used his house and orchard to shoot at us. A few shells burned down his splendid establishment, and left him firewood all around. The old villain probably curses the 'Feds' for rendering him houseless, and talks loudly of 'outrage.'

"Many fine residences and beautiful places in the country have been made ruins and desolate. The solitary chimneys rear their smoky heads over the blackened ruins of a once happy home, telling in a mournful manner the price of treachery and the doom of traitors..."

Corp. James B. Randall, Co. F, was assigned to a work detail to raze the strong enemy works. He and some of the boys used the opportunity in the field to obtain fresh provisions for their breakfast table back at camp:

"We went out with a party of 150 men from our regiment under Lieutenant Thompson of our company, for the purpose of pulling down the strong breastworks that General Longstreet's army had constructed for their defense. They had some splendid little forts that would bear upon this place and they would have used them, only for General Hooker sending for him to come to Fredericksburg to try his strength.

"While out today, I had a spare hour at noon to see what I could find. We went a little ways and came to a Reb's house, where we found a fine lot of hens in a good condition for scalding, but we never stopped for that. They were soon in our haversacks and back we came to our work. We expect to have a good breakfast, for they are now over the campfire."

Priv. Carmon inspected the surrounding countryside, mentioning in a letter on the 8th that Col. McConihe issued an order that morning putting a stop to the foraging of livestock from the local farms and households by his troops:



"Yesterday, I was out beyond where the Rebs had their breastworks. They were fortified pretty strong out there, I tell you. They had a line of breastworks for about two miles, and then they had went and cut down trees and left the limbs on them, and took and sharpened them and put them about six rods in front of their breastworks, but they had to go and leave it all. After they had left, the boys would go out a foraging and bring in pigs and calves, so we have had pretty good living for a few days, but this morning the colonel gave orders that we must not bring in any more, so that is stopped for the present."



Detail from "Military Map of Suffolk and Vicinity, for Brig.-Gen. E. L. Viele Surveyed and Drawn by 2^d Lieut Oscar Soederquist, 99th N.Y. Published in "Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies" (1891-1895)

The intent of the Union Army for the time being was to continue its occupation of Suffolk and strengthen its fortifications, while at the same time dismantling the old Confederate works surrounding the town. Adj't. Kisselburgh boasted of a strong fortification constructed by the men of the 169th, named in honor of U.S. Secretary of State William H. Seward the day of his visit to Suffolk:

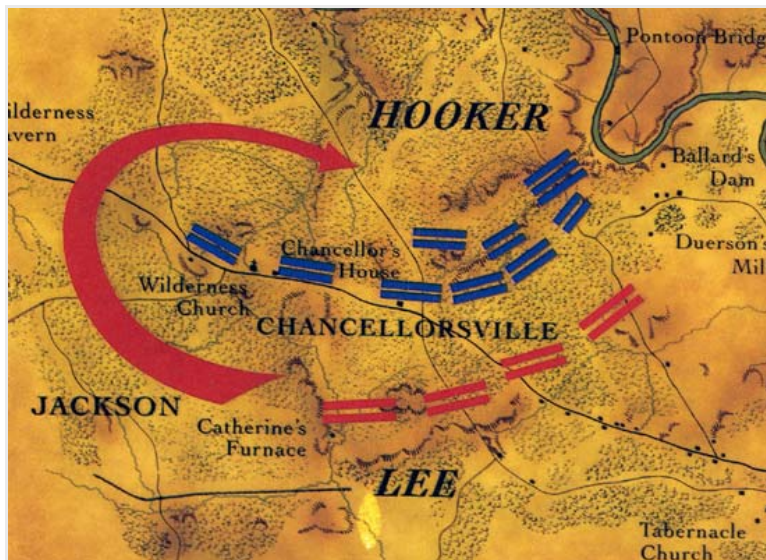
"To-day, several of the regiments temporarily sent here for the defence of the place are being ordered away, and it is possible that ere long the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth will receive marching orders, though of course our future movements are all uncertain.

"Since our regiment has been here, in addition to its duties on picket, in the trenches and in the field, our men have built a very large earth-work in the centre of the town, capable of covering 7,000 troops, and mounting several very large guns. It is not quite finished, but when completed will serve as a tower of strength for this post during the war. It is called Fort Seward, and was christened on the day of the visit of the Secretary of State to Suffolk. Lieut. McCardel, engineer-in-chief on Gen. Peck's staff, – a Trojan – has charge of the erection of the fortifications, and may well be proud of the engineering skill displayed by him in its construction. Nearly all of the works in this section were built under the superintendence of Lieut. McC."

Priv. Carmon helped build Fort Seward during the unusual period of peace and quiet at Suffolk, when there were no more enemy bullets to dodge:

"There is more [Negroes] here in Suffolk than you could shake a stick at in a week! We have good times of it here since the Rebs left. We don't have any drill or dress parades, but we have to go on fatigue every other day on the fort that they are a building here. The place don't seem natural since the Rebs retreated. It seems so quiet. We don't hear the booming of the cannon, nor the rattle of the small arms, nor the whiss of bullets as they go by a fellow's head. They sound a good deal like a bumble bee a humming in your ear.

"The other day, when we were out, the bullets came whistling around us pretty close. Major Alden kept a telling the boys to stand up straight and not to dodge. Pretty soon one came pretty close to his head and he put his head down close to his horse's neck and then the boys began to laugh at him. The major looked up and says, 'Hey boys, it is natural to dodge after all!'"



Map of the battle of Chancellorsville, May 2, 1863, showing Jackson's flanking march

Alfred's good cheer was absent from the thoughts of Col. McConihe, though. He was deeply worried about his brothers William and Samuel, captains in the 2^d N.Y. and 93^d N.Y., respectively, both fighting Lee at Chancellorsville:



Three Brothers (ca. 1862)
From left: Lieut.-Col. John McConihe, 169th N.Y., Capt. William McConihe, 2^d N.Y., and Capt. Samuel McConihe, 93^d N.Y.
 Collection of the New York State Military Museum,
 Saratoga Springs, New York

"We anxiously read the accounts from the Rappahannock and pray a complete victory for our arms. An indecisive result would be awful. Brother William, captain in the 2^d N.Y., is reported wounded. Nothing more said, and I await further intelligence. Brother Samuel, 93^d N.Y., captain, is also with Hooker, but his name is not in the list of killed and wounded. I, of course, borrow no trouble. What fearful slaughter, what terrible scenes."

William survived a gunshot wound to the chest but would die in 1893 at the early age of 61. A summary of his case was recorded in "The Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion (1861-65), Part I, Volume II" (1870):

"CASE. – Captain William McConihe, Co. F, 2^d New York Volunteers, was wounded at Chancellorsville, Virginia, May 2^d, 1863, by a conoidal ball, which entered the left chest between the fifth and sixth ribs near the sternum, and lodged. He was conveyed to the field hospital of the 1st Division, II Corps, where simple dressings were applied to the wound. He was subsequently treated in private quarters in Washington; was furloughed on the 11th, and discharged from service May 26th, 1863. Pension Examiner W. W. Potter reports, August 7th, 1866: "The pulse is irregular, frequent, and feeble. The peculiar action of the heart

and the condition of the circulation lead to the belief that the structure of the pericardium, or the heart itself, was injured by the ball. Disability total and permanent."



At the Front (1866)
George Cochran Lambdin (1830-1896)
Collection of the Detroit Institute of the Arts, Detroit, Michigan

In a letter written on the 9th to his friend and mentor, Martin I. Townsend, a prominent attorney in Troy, Col. McConihe confided his concern over the reduction in strength of the regiment since its departure for the front: "We left Troy with 776 men and now report just 700. Private James Frisbie of Co. A died last night, leaving us 699 in all. A great many shirkers, including many really disabled, have been discharged at the general hospital. A man is lost to the regiment when he sets foot in a general hospital. Five or six cowards have maimed themselves; thus, one by one, the regiment melts away in active service."

Not all of the regimental losses were due to sickness, death, or cowardice. In the case of Corp. William Claxton, Co. H, his services were needed elsewhere. A native of Ireland, making his home in Greenbush, N.Y., with his wife and two young daughters, William worked prior to his enlistment as a fireman aboard the steamships which plied the waters of the Hudson River. The gunboats operating at Suffolk had a need for such experienced personnel, and on the 20th William was detached for service aboard the U.S. Army gunboat *Smith Briggs*, by order of Maj.-Gen. John A. Dix, commanding the Dept. of the East.

Despite being armored with protective iron plates and well-armed with two guns, a 30-pdr. naval Parrott rifle and 32-pdr. naval gun (rifled), as well as a Dahlgren 12-Pounder Boat Howitzer for use in amphibious operations, the men who served on converted gunboats such as the *Smith Briggs* were often exposed to great danger as they navigated the often narrow rivers and channels of eastern Virginia, doing their best to keep river communications open and safe. The mission of these river gunboats is described in "The Photographic History of the Civil War, Volume 6: The Navies" (1911):



A Forgotten Fighter on the Pamunkey

Published in "The Photographic History of the Civil War, Volume 6: The Navies" (1911)

"Here on the Pamunkey River, her ports dropped and exposing her gaping gun-muzzles, lies one of the vessels hastily converted into gunboats to serve the early needs of the navy along the shores and rivers of the Atlantic coast. Manned by brave men who rendered yeoman service for the Federal cause, many of these small craft sank into oblivion, overshadowed by the achievements of the great monitors and ironclads which were eventually provided by the Navy Department for service along the shore.

"Such vessels were early useful in the York and Pamunkey Rivers in aiding the military efforts to advance upon Richmond by way of the Peninsula. White House on the Pamunkey was twice the base of the Federal army, and the Peninsula was a contested field till near the close of the war. Flotillas of these small vessels were constantly rendering aid to the army in keeping communications open and safe.

"The Navy Department purchased and equipped in all one hundred and thirty-six vessels in 1861, and by the end of the year had increased the number of seamen in the service from 7,600 to over 22,000. Many of these new recruits saw their first active service aboard the converted ferryboats, tugboats, and other frail and unfamiliar vessels making up the nondescript fleet that undertook to cut off the commerce of the South. The experience thus gained under very unusual circumstances placed them of necessity among the bravest sailors of the navy."

Pressed by reversals suffered early in the war, the army established its own fleet of gunboats to support the garrison at Suffolk when the town came under siege. But the army officers responsible for outfitting river steamers were not professional naval men, and Rear-Adm. Samuel P. Lee, commanding the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron, pointed out the dangers in a letter to Dix:

"You must not rely upon these few frail and open ferryboats and river steamers, which you call gunboats, to keep the rebels from crossing the Upper Nansmond, which is long, narrow, and crooked, a mere creek,



Major-General John A. Dix
Commanding Department of the East
Private Collection

and from which we were driven yesterday. These craft are effective only from the gallantry with which they are fought, with their boilers, steam-pipes, and magazines all exposed to the concentrated fire of the rebel batteries, while the sharpshooters pick off with facility our unprotected gunners.



The Fireman (1861-'65)
Alfred Rudolph Waud (1828-1891)
Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

"Reflect that these little vessels go into such a fight much in the exposed condition in which breached forts surrender when their magazines, &c., are exposed. I must call your attention to this in order that you may adapt your military dispositions to the necessities of your situation, which is not suitable to the operation of vessels."

The situation warned of by Adm. Lee came to pass for the *Smith Briggs* at Smithfield, Va., on February 1, 1864. Having participated in a successful expedition on the James River on January 25th, including the capture of the schooner *Thomas F. Dawson* of Richmond, loaded with tobacco, gold, currency, and bonds worth a total of \$10,500, the *Smith Briggs* drew the ire of the Confederate authorities in Richmond and a trap was laid to punish her for her insolence.

Confederate spies operated all along the Tidewater Basin area of Virginia during the war, and word was sent of an upcoming raid by the *Smith Briggs* against Smithfield, which was harboring river snipers operating from the banks of the James. A small force of infantry, cavalry, and artillery was dispatched by Richmond to surprise the gunboat and capture the enemy expedition. The *Smith Briggs* was destroyed when a Confederate shell exploded her boiler and 90 Union soldiers were taken prisoner, including William Claxton.

From the Confederate prison hellholes of Belle Isle, Va., to Andersonville, Ga., William suffered terribly from privation and exposure. Debilitated and near death from scurvy, he was released from Andersonville Prison on April 23, 1865. The Rebels brought the prisoners as far as Baldwin, Fla., leaving them to find their way into Jacksonville, a distance of 14 miles, as best they could. One can hardly imagine William's suffering as he forced himself to walk those last miles to freedom and to see his wife and little girls once more. He reached the U.S. Army field hospital in Jacksonville on the 29th, perishing that same day.



**Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument,
Rensselaer, (formerly Greenbush), New York**



Officers at Camp Benton, Maryland, 1861 (1881)

Winslow Homer (1836-1910)

Collection of the Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts

A change of venue was in the air for the 169th, an expedition to the Blackwater to remove the rails of the Norfolk & Petersburg R.R. and the Seaboard & Roanoke R.R., west of Suffolk, thus helping to secure the western flank of the Union garrison all the way to the river. But the 169th was almost held back from joining the expedition, as revealed in a letter to the *Daily Times* by an unidentified officer of the regiment:

"Gen. Peck sent word out to Foster, who commands the expedition, that he must not put in the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth New York or the Thirteenth Indiana, unless the emergency was very great. Gen. P. considers these two regiments his fighters, and wants them held in reserve. The Thirteenth Indiana is an old fighting regiment; was on the Peninsula; and our regiment did so well on the Edenton road that he has equal confidence in it. Two regiments of drafted men from Pennsylvania ran like sheep at the first fire. Next day, Foster sent them in again with regiments behind them to make them fight. Some of their men were shot by Federal troops while running away. Drafted men will not fight unless put in old regiments. This is the second time these same regiments have skedaddled."

The skedaddling Pennsylvania regiments mentioned in the *Daily Times* article were the 165th and 166th Infantry. Gen. Peck would ultimately change his orders, sending his "fighting regiments" to the Blackwater with the rest of Gen. Foster's forces. Major Alden's chronicle of the expedition is recorded in a very interesting letter sent to his brother Charles, a lawyer in Troy:

"On the 13th of May, about one o'clock P.M., the 169th Regiment, in common with other regiments, received orders to report outside of our intrenchments on the South Quay road by two o'clock P.M., in light marching order and with three days' rations. Rumors concerning our destination and purpose were rife. In fact, nothing can be so strange, so mysterious, so hermetically sealed for the purposes of military strategy as not to be divined, if not positively understood beyond a peradventure



Detail from "Bird's-Eye View of Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and the District of Columbia"
 Drawn and Engineered by J. Schedler, N.Y.
 Published by Sarony, Major & Knapp, Lithographers, N.Y. (ca. 1861)
 Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Expedition to the Blackwater to remove the rails of the Norfolk & Petersburg R.R. and the Seaboard & Roanoke R.R., May 13-27, 1863

1. May 13, 2 P.M.: The march commenced from Suffolk on the line of the Seaboard & Roanoke R.R.
2. Late afternoon: Col. Drake of the 112th N.Y. commanded the brigade until its arrival at Carrsville, where the column halted, at which time Gen. Foster's division was divided into task forces.
3. Night of the 13th: Col. Follansbee of the 6th Mass. relieved Col. Drake and marched the brigade most of the night, until it arrived at Windsor, where it stopped for the rest of the night.
4. Morning of the 14th: Col. Drake resumed command of the brigade, which got up before daylight and marched about three miles farther down the track, when it stopped again.
5. May 14-21: On picket duty as the contrabands pulled up the track of the Norfolk & Petersburg R.R. Returned to the outskirts of Suffolk on the 21st.
6. May 22-23: It was discovered that Drake's Brigade had not advanced as far up the Norfolk & Petersburg R.R. by two miles, as ordered, and the brigade was ordered to advance on the 22^d to Zuni Station, where it pulled up the track through the 23^d.
7. Night of the 23^d to May 24: Marched to Windsor, by way of the "Forest of Fire." The 24th (Sunday) was a day of rest at Windsor, with the headquarters of the 169th N.Y. at the Masonic Hall.
8. May 24, 4 P.M., to May 26: The brigade marched about five miles in the direction of Suffolk and encamped in a beautiful cypress and mulberry grove.
9. May 27: Returned to Suffolk.



Dodge's Mounted Rifles, aka the 1st N.Y. Mounted Rifles (1862)

by the soldiers in camp. What is lacking in one group will be speedily supplied by another. One camp rumor decided that our mission was to move forward to the Blackwater and engage the enemy at that point, so as to enable General Keyes to move into Richmond, which, under those circumstances, was regarded practicable. Another claimed that we ourselves were going to consummate a forced march to Richmond or to its fortified environments, and attack its protecting garrison, and thus enable Hooker to cross the Rappahannock. While other rumors, equally wild and sillier still, of the means whereby the Rebellion was to be quashed and Jeff Davis dethroned by purest strategy, had shoulder-strap authority.

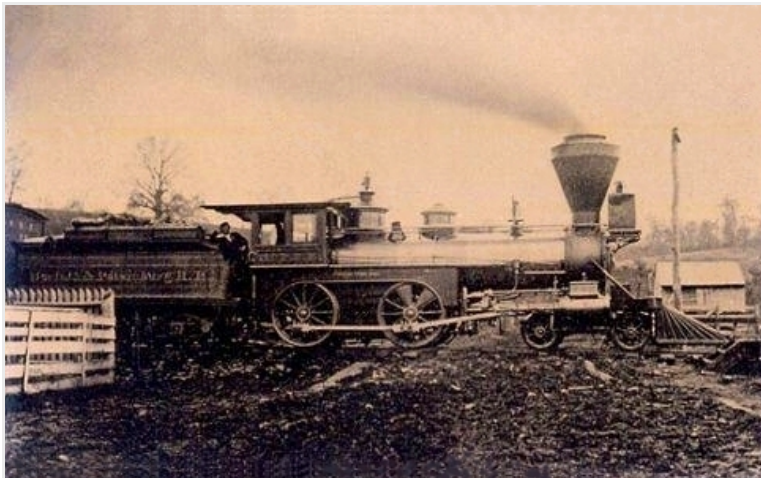
"At two o'clock P.M., the column was formed according to orders and the march commenced on the line of the Seaboard & Roanoke R.R. The column was composed of the following regiments: 13th Ind., 165th Penn. Militia, 116th Penn. M., 112th, 169th, 99th, 152nd, 170th, and 69th N.Y.V., 167th Penn. M., 10th N.J.V., with Howard's and Davis' Batteries of artillery, Spear's 11th Penn. Cavalry, Dodge's Mounted Rifles, and two or three more infantry regiments which subsequently joined our forces. The whole expedition was in command of General Foster, our division commander. Colonel Drake of the 112th N.Y.V. commanded our brigade until our arrival at Carrsville, a small village about 18 miles from Suffolk, where the column halted. Here he was relieved by Colonel Follansbee, 6th Mass. Vol., of the Baltimore riot fame.

The Objects of the Expedition.

"One of the several objects of the expedition which were involved in so much mystery was the destruction of the Seaboard & Roanoke R.R. and the Norfolk & Petersburg R.R. Some of the forces were sent forward about three miles to Beaver Dam Church, where a large party of contrabands commenced the destruction of one of the best railroads that was ever constructed, not excepting the New York Central R.R. or the Pennsylvania R.R. The party had not been long at work before the Confederates brought a section of artillery to bear upon the Federal wreckers, requiring a temporary transfer of the laborers to another section of the road, rather than precipitate a battle at that juncture. A battle was easily avoidable by the exercise of a little precaution, without a sacrifice of purpose or plan, simply by a trifling change in some details on the military chess board.

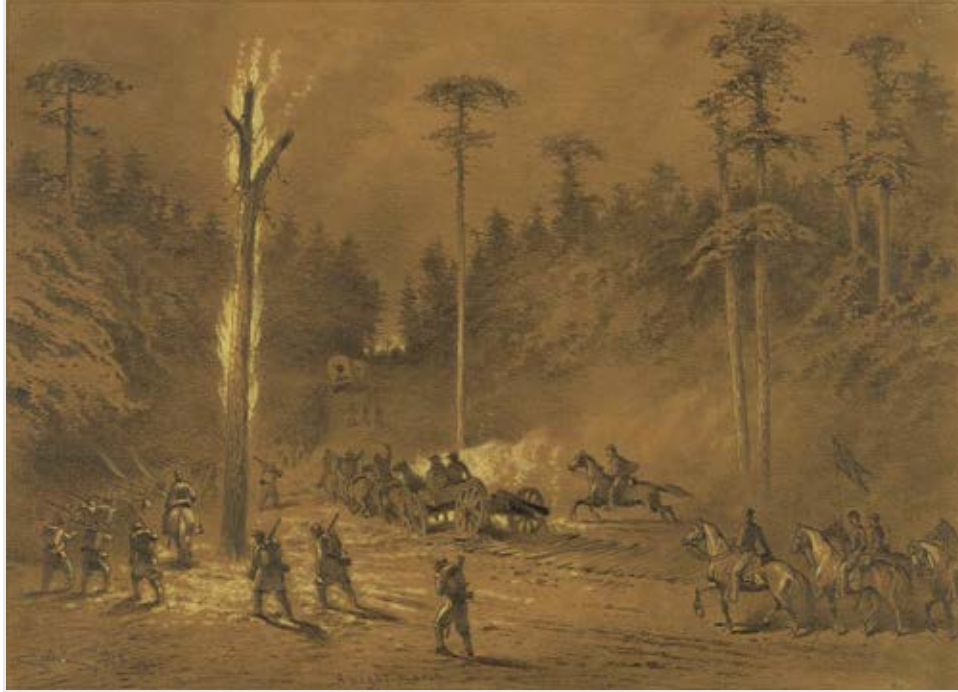


"General Foster's division was divided and subdivided, in order to restrain predatory bands of the enemy moving here and there within the territory of four or five hundred square miles, including largely a wild, uncultivated and swampy region bordering on the Dismal Swamp, the Nottoway and Blackwater, tributaries of the silent Chowan River. The orders that were imposed upon us required that we should keep the enemy occupied and also avoid an engagement. We held in restraint two brigades, besides a larger force south of the Blackwater. When circumstances not only invited but compelled a conflict, our readiness therefore was always manifest.



"At the request of Davis' Battery of artillery, the 169th N.Y.V. and the 13th Ind. Vols. had the honor of acting as its support. After the track had been taken up carefully and with mechanical skill, to avoid damaging any part thereof, each part was loaded upon a platform car, kept one length of track in advance, and pushed as far as Windsor, whence it was drawn by a locomotive to Suffolk.

"After we had reached within one-half mile of Suffolk in tearing up the track, it was discovered that there remained two miles of track that had not been appropriated next to the Blackwater River. Drake had not advanced as far, by two miles, as he had been ordered; accordingly, it



A night march – The army going into action through the woods (ca. 1876)
Edwin Austin Forbes (1839-1895)
Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

was directed that the error should be remedied. The 169th and the 112th, with one battery, were to support the contrabands while they did the work. This operation was within range of the enemy's heavy guns south of the Blackwater. The advance was made on the 22^d of May, 1863. Zuni Station was only a short distance beyond. Just at dusk, our regiment fell back one mile and spent the night and the next day, until the track had all been removed. One hundred wagons had been at work two days and one night, and 435,280 lbs. of track had been loaded upon them.

"That night, we fell back by way of the wagon road to Windsor, and that march of six miles was fraught with the most sublime romance and awful grandeur of which the mind can conceive.

A Forest of Fire.

"Imagine yourself, or rather, a solid column of soldiers with glittering bayonets, marching with steady tread through a narrow roadway leading through a dense forest, all ablaze, and this in the darkness of the night, all the time in constant expectation of being torn asunder by the exploding shell of a vigilant enemy. Such was the frightful and overwhelming scene for several miles. While surrounded by the atmosphere of fire, an aide came dashing along and gave as the consoling information that we would be attacked by the enemy in force before we should emerge from the forest and that reinforcements were on the way to meet us. The idea seemed to us perfectly absurd, as the red-hot elements around us were an impassable barrier to the advance of a foe, except directly on the road from front or rear; and with our advance and rear-guard, we experienced no anxiety. There were a few scattering shot upon our rear but without effect.



Old Masonic Hall at No. 7 "B" Avenue, Windsor, Virginia
Photograph courtesy of David R. Sawyer of Smithfield, Virginia

Known in 1863 as Temperance Lodge 164, the Masonic Hall in Windsor closed in 1866, reopening as Purdie Lodge 170 in 1873. The hall later became a home, at which time the front porch was added and windows replaced. The building is currently vacant.

The Sabbath, a Day of Rest.

"The 24th of May was Sabbath. Although in the enemy's country, we enjoyed a quiet day of rest with no enemy to disturb our meditations. Our headquarters were in the Masonic Hall of Windsor, but we found none of the emblems of Masonry. It is to be hoped that they had been properly cared for and saved from vandal hands. Our cooks served us well with lemonade and chicken fricassee, etc. Many of us worshipped God through the Spirit, in Spirit and in Truth, and through His Wondrous Works and His Holy Word, which was found in many pockets.

"In the afternoon, about four o'clock, we marched about five miles in the direction of Suffolk and encamped in a beautiful cypress and mulberry grove. We remained there all day Monday and until Tuesday afternoon, when we received orders to return to Suffolk. This we did with a good will, for we had been on the wing for two weeks, moving about every day amid clouds of dust or pouring rain; and every evening divesting ourselves of all our clothing and cutting out of our flesh about three score of wood ticks, and repeating the same process three or four times daily, and all this time without a change of clothing.

Our Return to Camp at Suffolk

was an occasion of much rejoicing. We reviewed our account of profits and losses, reported to the proper authority, Major-General Peck, and received his commendation by general orders.

"Notwithstanding all of our annoyances, we had enjoyed ourselves richly. We lived well – for soldiers. We did not take an egg or a chicken or a ham without rendering just compensation therefore. We did not pay the prices charged at that time in our Troy markets, but a reasonable and a satisfactory price. We accomplished some confiscations in which we were justified. For example: the first night that we spent near Blackwater Ford, application was made by one of our soldiers for a



supply of ham and eggs, for which we offered a reasonable compensation, and a middle-aged lady declared that she didn't have anything in the house or on the premises for 'you Yankees;' whereupon this gentlemanly Yankee soldier felt justified in examining one of two or three smokehouses near the house and found it full of smoking hams. A contraband slave appeared and gave the information that the contents of the smokehouses belonged to the Confederate Government and that any man that steals from them will be shot by the Southern soldiers. After further examination, hundreds of fat, plump chickens (or hens) were found, and in the house cellar, several barrels of applejack were carefully husbanded in safe storage for the Confederacy. A report was accordingly made to the commanding officer, and all the Confederate property was duly confiscated as contraband of war, according to an Act of Congress.

"In one piece of woods where we halted our column for much-needed rest, we found a crib containing, according to careful estimate, one thousand bushels of corn; and running wild through the woods we found at different times sizable droves of swine which ran against the soldiers' bayonets and were fatally injured. As these were contraband, they were tenderly cared for. Hardtack and bacon were never more palatable than at such times.

"Thirty-five miles of the best railroad track in the United States were taken up and saved for our government from the two roads, *viz.*: The Seaboard & Roanoke R.R. and the Petersburg R.R. The rails weighed 62 lbs. per yard.

"It may easily be estimated therefore how much this expedition has saved the Union and the extent of the damage it has caused the Confederacy, aside from the sacrifice of life and the sufferings from wounds and other casualties."

Col. John, an old campaigner in the long marches of Missouri with the 1st Nebraska early in the war, wrote of the expedition in his usual evocative style, expressing bitterness over the wholesale destruction of Southern homes by the cavalry:

"On the 13th of May, we were ordered out 'in light marching order' and three day's rations. The three days lengthened into fourteen, and all that time, without tents or change of clothing, we were kept constantly on the alert, day and night, ready at a moment's warning to repel an enemy. The duties were constant and arduous, and I was routed from my wearied sleep upon my blanket by one order and another, as re-



The Result of War – Virginia in 1863
Published in "Harper's Weekly" (July 18th, 1863)

morselessly as a nurse wakes its patient to administer the doctor's potion every hour. Some days I felt like laying myself beneath some generous pine, forgetting military care and excitement, and to fall asleep, heedless of orders and consequences, of friends and foes, and to dream that the soft music of the winds, sighing upon the leafy harps of the forest, was the sweet lullabies of other days, rocking me to sleep. But the feeling would soon pass away, and I would find myself shouting, 'Column, forward – March!' and on we would go through wood and field, over brook and fence, to some new position, where it was thought the enemy might assail us.

"The expedition was not monotonous; there were exciting scenes and grand incidents, such as crowd the canvas of the picture of war. It is midnight, and we are passing along a road which leads through a dense forest, which has never been disturbed by the woodman's axe, when the column halts. The splashing of the water ahead tells me we are crossing a swamp. Soon, a huge fire illumines the darkness, and it seems as if I was in fairyland. On either side of the road, the dim forms of beings, as the troops pick their way over the swamp, are seen moving like specters among the trees, and all is still. A splash in the water, and an 'Oh!' brings my thoughts back to the reality, and I see a soldier who has missed his footing, plunging in a pool of water. 'Give me your hand, Jim!' his comrade exclaims, and Jim is lifted again on the bank. I wish you could have enjoyed this midnight scene of troops passing through dense woods, interspersed with swamps, the whole illumined by fires. It was a grand sight, and one long to be remembered.

"On our return from beyond Windsor, the 169th and 152^d N.Y. Regiments, under my command, (I was Brigadier, Mrs. Newton, for about four hours, being the senior officer of the two regiments), were compelled to pass along a road lined on either side by burning woods.



Burning of Mr. Mumma's houses and barns at the fight of the 17th of September, 1862 (1862)
Alfred Rudolph Waud (1828-1891)
Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The troops preceding us had fired the underbrush, and the flames were crawling up the trunks and through the branches of the stately oaks and pines. Thus, for five miles we marched along, dazzled by the scene, heedless of the blinding smoke and suffocating dust. Very many houses were burned along the various roads during the expedition, and their burning timbers on charred remains told a fearful story of war.

"I am bitterly opposed to such useless horrors, but those committing these outrages always meet you with a reason. Something had been done by these people to cause the destruction of their homes. I do not know that our men of the 169th committed any outrage of this kind. It was usually done by the cavalry, who had been in the vicinity at other times and alleged a grievance. But you can imagine these scenes and incidents, the invariable accompaniment of an army. Old men stolidly indifferent, old women livid with fear, young women scarce, and able-bodied men not at home. You can picture it all."

Priv. Carmon and the boys had themselves some fun while the heavy work of tearing up the railroad tracks was being handled by the former slaves of Suffolk, referred to as "contraband":

"I received your letter some time ago, but could not answer it before, because it is the first time that we have been in camp in two weeks. We went on an expedition to the Blackwater for the purpose of tearing up the railroad. We started from camp two weeks ago last Wednesday, and got back last Tuesday night, about dark. After we got the railroad torn up, we commenced to retreat. That was after we had been out a week and got within about eight miles, when we had to turn off and go in another direction to tear up another railroad. We marched almost all of that night, untill we got to a place called Windsor, where we stopped for the rest of that night. They got us up before daylight the next morning, and marched us about three miles farther down the track, when we



Coffee Boilers (ca. 1876)
Edwin Austin Forbes (1839-1895)
Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

stopped again. They sent our company out on picket duty and the [Negroes] went to work to pull up the track.

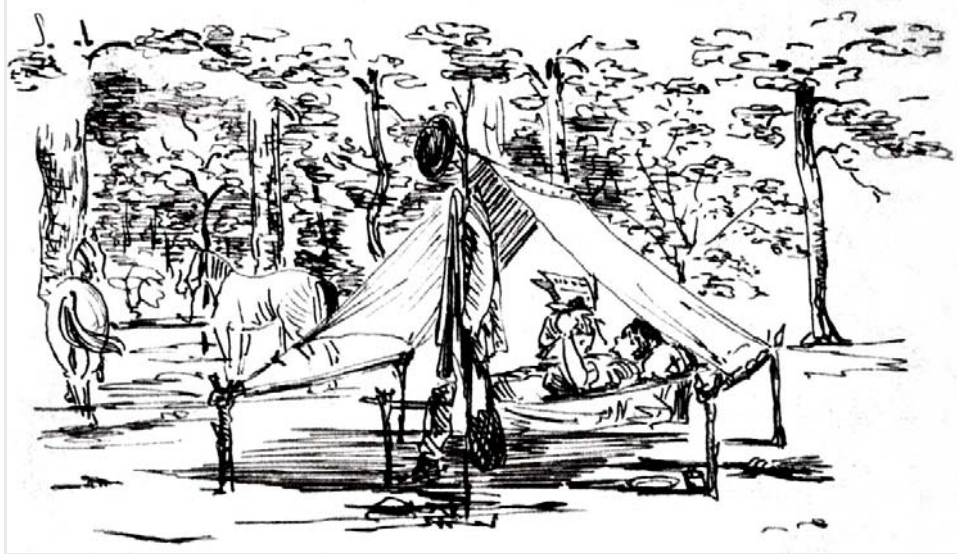
"That night, they marched us about halfway back to Windsor, where we stopped again by the side of an old steam sawmill. The engine and smokestack was there yet. There was a pair of old cartwheels there, too. We took the cartwheels and run them up on top of a large pile of sawdust that was there. Then we took the smokestack and made two pieces of it. We took one half of it and put it on the wheels and made a large siege gun of it. Then we took the large drive wheels off of the engine and made another gun carriage out of them. We took and put them down on the track and made another gun there. We took and fixed them up so that they looked pretty saucy a little ways off! We done this just for the fun because we did not have anything else to do.

"By that time, they had got the track taken up almost to Windsor. The next morning, they got us in line again and we expected to go up to the village, but instead of that, they marched us off toward the Reb country, about two miles farther. It seems that they had a mistake in the order and we had not gone down the track far enough the first time. We went up the track until we came to where the Rebs had torn up the track and then stopped again. And they went to work to tearing up the track again, and it took longer to tear up them two miles than it had to tear up five miles before, because they had to draw all the iron up to Windsor on wagons.

"We could see the Rebel picket from where we were. Some of our men fired a couple of shots at them but did not hit anyone, I guess. You just had to see the [Negroes] run when the guns were fired off!

"The weather is very warm here in the daytime but the nights are pretty cold. I am very well at present and fat as a pig!"

The expedition took a toll on some of the men, unused to marching in the disagreeably hot weather. Wagonmaster Robert Whitcomb, Co. D, an expert at



procuring the finest provisions available for the officers of the regiment, and thus indispensable to Quartermaster Sidney N. Kinney, describes how he and his brother George fared in the swamps of Virginia:

"It is with pleasure that I write to you to let you know that we still live, but I am not very well at present. We have been out on another raid and it was too much for me, but I am getting better and I hope to be alright in a day or two more.



**1st Lieutenant and Quartermaster
Sidney N. Kinney, 169th N.Y.**

"I tell you, father, I have got friends here! The quartermaster comes into my tent and says, 'Bob, now if you think that you can eat anything, say what it is and you shall have it,' and the colonel sent for me to come and eat dinner with him to-day, and they might use me well, for I do all that lays in my power to please them and I don't lose anything by it.

"George tired out the first day that we started out and I put him in one of my wagons, and he stayed with us nine days, and then I got him a chance to ride to camp, and when I got in he was alright and I had to go to bed. But thank God I am better now. But you would laugh to have seen us go to bed in the cornfields and in the woods. The quartermaster says that he don't want to see me sick and I must not bother my head about the teams until I get better. I have sat up most all day to-day, but I am weak yet. You can see that by the writing, as Russ Gardner says my hand stutters.

"I wrote to Sarah yesterday and I did not tell her that I was sick, but I was pretty bad off then and now I am alright; but I shan't do any work in a week. But don't let it worry you and don't tell Sarah or mother if you can help it, for they will worry about it. But I am sitting up and the doctor says that I am alright."

Priv. Nathaniel D. Marvin, Co. H, another lad from Rensselaer County, was obliged by illness to remain in camp while his regiment took to the field:

"I have not been able to do anything for over two weeks and I don't know as I shall ever be able to do any more if we stay in this place, for it don't agree with me at all. But I don't want any of you to worry yourselves about me.

"The regiment has not been to camp in two weeks. We expect them in tomorrow, but they may not come in a week. I heard from them last night. They are eight miles from here now. They have been part of the time 20 miles off. The boys from Sand Lake are all well, pretty much. Barney is well and pretty tough. He has been out there ever since the regiment went. Some have had to come back and stay a few days and go back again."



Washing day – Column on the march (May 5, 1864)
Edwin Austin Forbes (1839-1895)
Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

In a follow-up letter to his wife, Nathaniel announced the safe return of the regiment on the 27th, including his brother, Priv. Barney M. Marvin, Co. H:

"The regiment came in Tuesday, and they was a nasty looking lot of men after being out fourteen days and laying in the woods. But they all seemed to be of good cheer and wanted to go back again, for they said they could have more fun out there than they could here, for they would go out on foraging parties and get anything they wanted to eat. They had pigs, chickens, and geese, and honey, and cider, and everything they could find!"

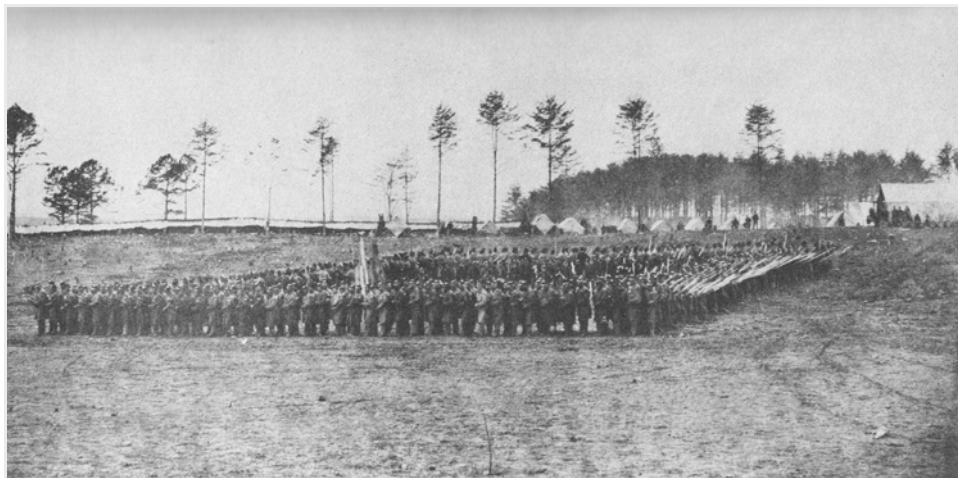


ENTERED ACCORDING TO ACT OF CONGRESS IN THE YEAR 1863 BY I. C. EASTMAN IN THE CLERK'S OFFICE OF THE DIST. COURT OF MASS.

- | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Col. Follansbee's & Field & Staff Officers' Quarters | 5. Commissary | 7. Fort Union | 9. 13 th Indiana Reg't. | 11. Breast Works |
| 2. Mass. 7 th Battery, Capt. Davis | 3. Fort Halleck | 4. Line Officers' Quarters | 6. Battery Mass. | |
| | 10. Petersburg R. R. | 8. Fort McClellan | | |

Camp of Massachusetts Sixth Reg't. Vols., Suffolk, Va.
Published by I. C. Eastman, Bookseller & Stationer, Lowell, Mass. (1863)
From an original drawing in possession of Col. A. S. Follansbee
Collection of the Chelmsford Historical Society, Chelmsford, Massachusetts

The 6th Mass. Infantry left for Boston on the 26th after serving in the Union garrison at Suffolk since September 15, 1862, its 9-month term of service ended. The 169th moved to the 6th's camp after its return from the Blackwater the following day. Formerly known as Camp Dodge, the 169th renamed their new encampment as Camp Foster, in honor of their division commander, Brig.-Gen. Robert S. Foster. The site of Camp Griswold, the regiment's former camp since its arrival in Suffolk in April, was to the right of the train depicted traveling westward on the Norfolk & Petersburg R.R. in the lithograph above.



The Napoleonic hollow square was a formation to protect against cavalry attack, used at Gettysburg

The regiment continued to turn out at four o'clock each morning, remaining under arms for fifteen minutes. There was a rumor in town that the 169th had been

ordered to join Hooker's army, but it amounted to nothing. Priv. Carmon would write on the 7th that the local strawberries and cherries were plentiful, as would be the peaches if the regiment remained in Suffolk long enough, but he found the routine of drill to be little fun:

"It is very lonesome here now. If it was not for the work that we have to do we would all die of the blues, but they manage to keep us pretty busy all of the time. It is nice and cool this morning. There is a nice breeze a blowing. We have got to commence to drill again now. We have not drilled any in over three months, only in the manual-of-arms. We have forgotten all that we ever knew about battalion movements. Last night, they wanted to form a hollow square and they had forgotten how.

"I have been on fatigue to-day and so I get rid of drill. We have to drill six hours a day now, but that will soon play-out. I guess when the weather gets to be a little warmer, the officers don't like the drill any better than we do. They have just drummed up for battalion drill, but I can sit in my shanty and laugh at them."

Despite the arrival of fresh produce, Robert Whitcomb would have none of it:

"I like this place very well, only the water han't good. How many times I have wished that I could be up there long enough to get a drink of water out of some of them springs on the feeder! Father, I drank water last week and called it bully, that I would not wash my feet in if I was to home, but I han't dead yet, and I hope that God will spare me to serve my time out and return home to my family, for He knows that I want to see them.

"The weather is very warm here, and plenty of new potatoes and cabbage and beets and everything, but I don't eat any of them for I am afraid of them and I han't a going to kill myself if I can help it.

"They say that the Rebs are within 12 minutes of us again, and if they are we shall soon have some more fun with them, for it is fun to see them fall down as they did at Carrsville."

Priv. Carmon got himself in a little bit of trouble for slacking off while on fatigue duty, which he admitted to his sister in a letter on the 11th:

"We have to go on fatigue in the forenoon, and company and battalion drill in the afternoon days, when we don't have to go on fatigue. We have to drill most all of the forenoon. I was on fatigue yesterday forenoon and then I skedaddled in the afternoon, and the captain was a going to put me in the guardhouse, a place that I have never been put in yet, but he made me a little mad and I told him to put me in if he wanted to, and that he would not make much out of it. So he made up his mind not to put me in.

"We have got to go out on another expedition this afternoon. We have got three day's rations. I don't know when we will get back. I want you to send me five dollars in your next letter. The drums has beat to fall-in, so goodbye, for this time."

Col. McConihe, having received word that his older brother William was walking around the streets at home in Troy and expected to soon recover from his gunshot wound, despite the presence of a lead ball lodged in his chest. The colonel was also pleased with the regiment's new accommodations, as evidenced in the following letter to his friends in Cincinnati:

"I must tell you how I am situated and what my duties and surroundings are. The regiment now occupies the camp of the 6th Massachusetts, about one-half mile from the railroad depot. The spot was, a year ago, woodland, and there are still standing throughout the camp large pines and oaks. We have removed the stumps and underbrush, and the surface is as clean and neat as the walks of a well-swept garden. Every morning the police sweep the camp with brush brooms and remove all rubbish. The officers all have log houses with sash and doors obtained from deserted mansions hereabouts, and the men have raised their 'A' or 'wedge' tents on logs thus:



Sketch of an enlisted soldier's quarters, 169th N.Y. (June 11, 1863)
Correspondence of Lieut.-Col. John McConihe, 169th N.Y.
Collection of the Albany Institute of History & Art, Albany, New York

"I have built a 'Headquarters Palace' of split-pine slabs or shingles, and built it thus:



Sketch of the "Headquarters Palace," 169th N.Y. (June 11, 1863)
Correspondence of Lieut.-Col. John McConihe, 169th N.Y.
Collection of the Albany Institute of History & Art, Albany, New York

which rude diagram represents in the form of a cross, it being made in a rural style, with no ceiling except the roof boards, no partitions, nicely floored, four glazed sashes with 24 lights or panes of glass, and containing 280 square feet. Pine trees are planted in rows all around, and I now sit writing at my desk near the window marked 'No. 2.'"

In a letter to his friend John Kellogg, Col. McConihe evinced his gratitude for the relatively good circumstances enjoyed by his regiment:

"I will briefly state that everything concerning the 169th is satisfactory and that we have no complaints either against our superiors or inferiors to mention. The regiment stands well and all is smooth. We are a 'lucky' regiment. We now occupy the best camp in Suffolk, in a grove, and our quarters all built, the officers all being in roomy log houses. The 6th Mass. turned everything over to us, and they have made during

the past winter most comfortable quarters, at a large outlay of both labor and money. Then we are the first regiment paid off here and we now rejoice in plenty of money and are square with the U. S."



A jerilla – a deserter (ca. 1861-'65)
Alfred Rudolph Waud (1828-1891)
Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Elaborating on Priv. Whitcomb's intelligence about the nearby Rebs, Col. John confirmed there had been considerable firing on the South Quay road during the night of the 10th and that guerrillas were operating in the area. Having received orders to hunt them down, the colonel wrote, "I do not think we shall be gone but a few days; neither do I look for more than 'skirmishing.'"

The 169th would be obliged to leave over 100 sick men in camp before joining the June expedition, according to Corp. Randall in a letter to his father. He compared the regiment's plight to the relative health of the 130th N.Y., at Suffolk since the previous September: "We are having a hard time, but the 130th are not sickly. They have got used to the water and climate."

Gen. Alden would write of the expedition in his memoir: "In the early part of June, another expedition to the Blackwater was accomplished via the Roanoke Road and across the uncultivated, thickly wooded country to Zuni and Windsor, etc., destroying bridges and razing Confederate fortifications, encountering and dispersing, with trifling loss, inconsiderable forces of the enemy, giving them a vivid impression of the apparent omnipresence of the Yankee troops."

The absence of newspaper accounts about the expedition would be noticed by Priv. Merriam, announcing his intentions to rectify the matter in the *Daily Times* on the 15th: "I have nowhere seen a full account of the recent, intensely interesting and prolonged expedition to the Blackwater, in which the 169th took part. I shall make it the subject of a separate letter. – Twelve thousand troops composed the expedition." Priv. Merriam's article about the expedition of June 11-20, appearing in the *New-York Times* on the 26th, is reproduced below in its entirety:

The New-York Times.

JUNE 26, 1863.

FROM THE BLACKWATER.

Objects of the Recent Expedition – The Forces Engaged – The Results.

Correspondence of the New-York Times.

June 21, 1863.

The expedition that proceeded hence on the 11th of the current month, and returned to this point on yesterday, was not without both important prospects and results. Its leading object was to investigate the strength of and destroy the three leading strongholds of the enemy on the Blackwater River, all of which were within a distance of twenty-five miles of Suffolk. It was an additional object of the expedition, of course, to learn the number of the opposing forces immediately on the Blackwater. The expedition originally started out under command of Gen. CORCORAN, and consisted of the following named forces, which I am permitted to indicate: One Hundred and Sixty-ninth New-York Volunteers, Lieut.-Col. JOHN MCCONNIE commanding, occupying the post of honor in the column; the Ninety-ninth New-York, the Sixty-ninth New-York, the One Hundred and Eighteenth New-York, the One Hundred and Fifty-second New-York, the One Hundred and Twelfth New-York, the One Hundred and Sixty-fourth New-York, the One Hundred and Fifty-fifth New-York, the One Hundred and Thirtieth New-York, the One Hundred and Seventieth New-York, the One Hundred and Sixty-sixth Pennsylvania Militia, the Twenty-sixth Michigan Volunteers, the Eleventh Rhode Island Volunteers, the Fourth Regular Artillery, the First Delaware Artillery, the gallant Thirteenth Indiana, (Gen. FOSTER'S old regiment,) commanded by Lieut.-Col. DOBBS, SPEAR'S Cavalry, and DODGE'S Mounted Rifles. The force numbered six thousand infantry, in addition to the artillery batteries and mounted rifles. Gen. CORCORAN moved his command by way of the South Quay road, not, however, without directing the regimental commanders to discourage pillaging upon the enemy, or wantonly destroying private property. The remarks of Lieut.-Col. MCCONNIE, commanding the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth New-York,



to his regiment, near which I happened to be standing at the time, will serve to shadow forth the intent of Gen. CORCORAN in this regard.

Col. McCONIHE, as the regiment was drawn up in line, very impressively said:

An order just received from the General Commanding requires regimental Commandants to caution their commands against the many improprieties which too often occur while troops are marching through the country. Although I believe you fully understand your duties and responsibilities as soldiers of the Republic, yet there are always some unauthorized persons who straggle from the different regiments, and by their outrageous acts disgrace the army and our cause. Let it not be said there is one such in this regiment, but if there is, let him not do these things with impunity, and cast opprobrium upon us all. The officers must know him, and he must be properly punished and dealt with. Private property will be taken possession of and destroyed through the proper authorities, whenever the exigencies of the service demand it, and no one is allowed to otherwise interfere with it. This is just and right, and by always observing this rule the regiment will never cast discredit upon itself or our cause.

The first point reached was the South Quay, after which Franklin and the Blackwater Bridge were successfully visited, all of which points were severely shelled, for the purpose of drawing out the enemy. Each of the above-named places were evacuated, with the exception of a few sharpshooters, who had been warily left to guard the fords, and from whom our forces experienced considerable annoyance. All this accomplished, the troops returned to Franklin, for the purpose of making a reconnaissance toward North Carolina and Petersburg. In attempting to cross the Blackwater, a passage it was not imperatively necessary to force, the fire of the sharpshooters came to be so galling, that it was wisely thought it would occasion too great a sacrifice of life, and one that would not be commensurate with the object sought to be attained. During the latter part of the expedition, the command was turned over to Brig.-Gen. R. S. FOSTER, a splendid soldier, who, as Colonel of the Thirteenth Indiana, has displayed signal ability since his accession to the field. His commission, accompanied with the "single star," reached him but two days before he was ordered to join the forces as Commander. I regret to add that Capt. HART, a gallant officer of the Ninety-ninth New-York, and several privates, lost their lives by the



Franklin, located on the west bank of the Blackwater, is mistakenly labeled as Carrsville in this map. Carrsville is located 6 miles to the east.

hands of the unscrupulous sharpshooters. At one time it was rumored that Maj. ALONZO ALDEN, of the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth New-York, had received a mortal wound. It was thought to be more than probable, when his fearlessness and daring upon the Edenton Road, in the affair of the 24th of April, were remembered. The rumor, to the intense gratification of his friends (not a few) in the brigade, proved not to be well-founded. Maj. ALDEN is recognized as belonging to a class of Union soldiers the fewer of whom we lose the better it will be for the Union cause. The troops throughout behaved well and elicited the favorable notice of the Commanding General. Among those who were conspicuously and honorably active, so much as to command the particular complimentary attention of the Generals, were the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth New-York, DODGE'S Mounted Rifles, One Hundred and Twelfth New-York and the Ninety-ninth New-York.

Matters of high military and public import are transpiring here just now, but to write of them in full would involve unfavorably the interests of the Government. All I am permitted to say is, let the enemy approach these fortifications if they are fully resolved to die in the last ditch.

The 169th returned to camp from this very fatiguing march on the 18th, according to a letter written the same day to the *Daily Times*:

"The regiment about an hour since returned to camp from a six days' excursion or pic nic to the Blackwater River. We visited Franklin, South Quay, and Blackwater Bridge, shelled the rebels at each place, but received no reply except from an occasional sharpshooter. Our forces lost six or seven killed and wounded, but none from the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth. We marched upwards of one hundred miles during the six days of our absence, the second day making twenty-five



Going into bivouac at night (ca. 1876)
Edwin Austin Forbes (1839-1895)
Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

miles, and to-day (from 4 A. M. to 1 P. M.) marching twenty miles. At Franklin, we tried to cross; but the rebs 'didn't see it,' and as the object was only to burn a little railroad bridge, Gen. Foster thought it would not pay to lose the number of men that must necessarily fall if the attempt was persisted in; so he came back. The trip was very fatiguing, as we did some tall marching. Lieut.-Col. McConihe and Major Alden both say they never experienced anything like it.

"Suffolk is to be evacuated. I do not know where we shall go; but it is reported we are to 'hang out' for a while at or near Portsmouth, Va. However, letters are still to be directed to this place until further notice."

In a letter to his father on the 24th, Col. McConihe elaborated on the travails of the hot, dusty march through the Virginia countryside:

"Our last march to the Blackwater occupied seven days and was by far the most tedious tramp I ever experienced. The weather was exceedingly warm and the dust almost suffocating. We marched one day 25 miles and no day less than 12 miles. The dust was ankle-deep and the column could not be distinguished but by the long cloud of dust which marked its course, ascending like smoke above the tall pines.

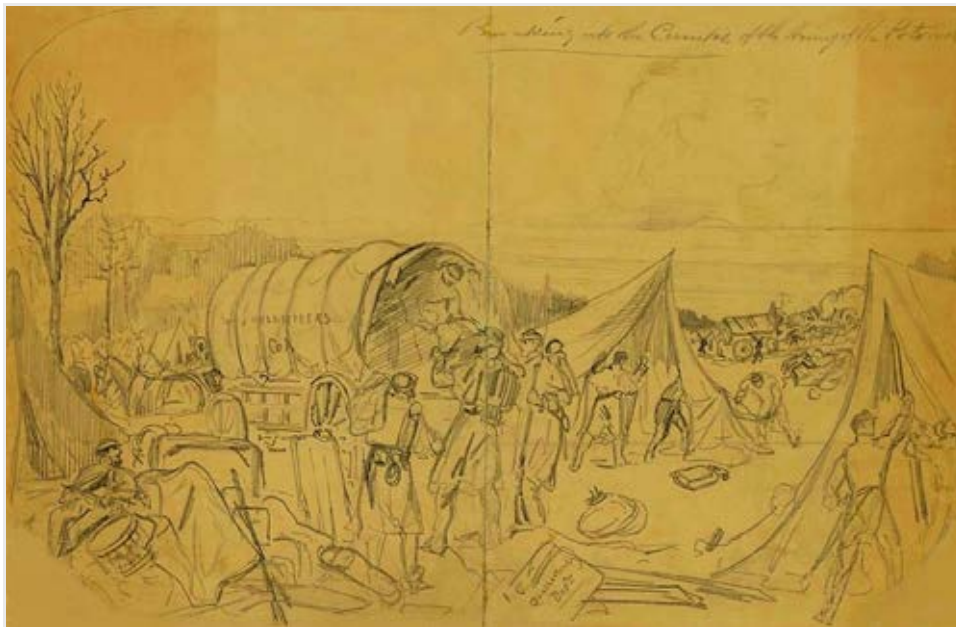
"The forests of this country far exceed anything I ever looked upon – their growth and density astonished me and the size of the trees surpass all previous experience. There is an abundance of good timber in this region for all purposes; large, straight pines; noble, old oaks; thrifty cypresses; cedar; walnut; and a variety of other species. The soil is sandy but yields well and abundantly. In appearance, the country is beautiful – forests and fields, rivers and brooks, houses and farms, and above all, the most romantic roads leading in all directions and lined on either side by tall forests of pine, with no underbrush, the tall, clean pines reminding one more of an avenue through some well-cared-for park, than through the wild forests of Virginia. But the whole country

is devoid of male inhabitants, and many of the houses are closed and deserted. Yet most of the fields are cultivated in corn, wheat and oats, although there seems no one to attend to the crop. The people are all in rebellion and the women are gloomy and indifferent. The passing to and fro of both armies has, to a certain extent, desolated the country. Fences are down and the ruins of what were once many a happy home and elegant place tell of the fearful devastation of war. I saw one splendid mansion with its numerous out-buildings wrapped in flames, and the long avenue of beautiful cedars which led up to it from the front road lent an additional gloom to the picture. I wondered at the cause of this and tried to imagine how a people could forsake all, desert their homes, their lands, their kin and their country for no cause and without justification.

"The troops, generally, behaved well on this last expedition and there were few instances of marauding on private property.

"My health continues good and my arm is nearly healed. It does not trouble me when in camp and only when I am wearied. Then it feels tired and useless."

In a letter written on the 24th, Priv. Carmon euphemistically wrote that the men of the 169th had yet to fire their muskets at the enemy since entering the war:



Breaking up the Camps of the Army of the Potomac (February 1863)

Arthur Lumley (ca. 1837-1912)

Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

"There is not much a going on here now. They are evacuating Suffolk. The forces have mostly left, except our brigade and Corcoran's Legion. Dodge's Mounted Rifles are here yet. All the rest of the cavalry has left. There is three batteries here yet.

"I expect that we will leave Suffolk in a few days, but where we will go remains to be seen. It is according with what success that raid the Rebs have made in Pennsylvania will have. But to-night's paper says that the Rebs are retreating. I hope it is so and I hope that they will attack Washington, and if they do, they will get the hardest whipping that they ever have had, for it is most impossible for an army to get in.



All in a Day's March
Frederic S. Remington (1861-1909)

"We just got back from another raid out to the Blackwater the other day. While we were out there, we marched about one hundred forty miles. The day that we started out, we only marched sixteen miles. The next we marched twenty five. Some days we would march thirty miles, but the last day's march, when we were a coming into camp, was the hardest. They marched the regiment twenty miles before noon. There was several got sun-struck, for it was an awful hot day, and the road was very dusty. I heard that there were several died from the effects of the last day's march, but I don't know how true it is.

"We could not find the Rebs in any force out there, but the bushwackers were pretty plenty. But there was one day that they sent out their skirmishers and they had quite a little brush. We had several wounded and one killed on our side. Our regiment has not had a chance to fire a gun at the Rebs yet, and I hope that we never will."

The Union Army's decision to abandon Suffolk was made from "purely strategic reasons," reported the *New-York Times*, "as it required a larger number of Union forces to hold it than its importance would warrant." In an article by Priv. Merriam about the forthcoming Peninsula Campaign by the 169th's brigade, the newspaper included the following commentary about the 169th:

"One Hundred and Sixty-ninth New-York, Col. CLARENCE BUEL, (who, having been severely wounded in the affair on the Edenton Road on the 24th of April, devolved the command upon Lieut.-Col. JOHN MCCONIHE, one of the wounded heroes of the battle of Shiloh;) the One Hundred and Twelfth New-York, Col. DRAKE commanding; the One Hundred and Sixty-fifth Pennsylvania Militia, Col. BUHLER, and the One Hundred and Sixty-sixth Pennsylvania, Lieut.-Col. REISENGER. The elements of the brigade are, in some respects anomalous, two of its

regiments being composed of conscripts from the imperiled State of Pennsylvania; still, Maj.-Gen. DIX looks to the brigade for valuable results. One thing is certain, based upon positive action in the field – the Thirteenth Indiana and the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth New-York are congenial companions, no less in the midst of ensanguined strife than amid the more gracious amenities and pleasures of well-ordered camp life.

"The One Hundred and Sixty-ninth New-York is composed of some of the best material the State has sent to the field. Col. BUEL, Lieut.-Col. McCONIHE and Maj. ALDEN comprise a superior list of Field officers. I have seen the regiment under fire, when two of its Field officers were wounded, and the boys did nobly. One of these was its first action, and the result of its conduct was a special order, commending the courage and tenacity of the command."



Siege of Vicksburg: Assault on Fort Hill (1863)

Thure de Thulstrup (1848-1930)

Collection of the U.S. Army Heritage & Education Center, Carlisle, Pennsylvania

In a letter on the 24th to his friend John Newton of Cincinnati, John McConihe expressed his great concern over the progress of the war:

"Everything is gloomy. Vicksburg does not fall, we have lost heavily at Winchester, the Rebels are in Pennsylvania and Maryland, and rumor says Hooker has been terribly beaten. The whole sky is dark, and good men fall in the slaughter, like sheep in the shambles.

"We are evacuating Suffolk, and shall fall back on Norfolk. It has just been discovered that Suffolk is of no use, although we have built over twenty strong forts and over 15 miles of breastworks. But in our cause I have faith, and in the end, the right must prevail. Oh, how I hate the traitors at home, those who lasso us in the dark and keep their dastardly throats safe from danger, to malign us. How I wish some plague would take away every man who is false to his country, and to the principles of justice and truth in this contest.

"But I will cease my tirade and say my health is good and my arm nearly well. It gets very tired, when out on such fatiguing expeditions

as that from which we returned last week. Seven day's marching, from 25 to 14 miles each day, through endless clouds of dust and a scorching summer sun. I stand up as well as any of them, and have been on duty every day since I joined the regiment in February with my arm in a sling.

"P.S. Private William H. Merriam sends his most hilarious respects. Bill is the same good-natured, clever man that he was in the days of the 'old Congress street building.'"

Col. McConihe wrote a letter the following day to his friend John Newton's wife, Lavinia, who helped him convalesce at their home in Cincinnati following his being wounded at Shiloh when he was with the 1st Nebraska Infantry:

"This is probably my last night in 'Headquarters Palace' and in Suffolk. We are under marching orders, and to-morrow we shall go somewhere; I cannot now say where. The nature of the order is such that I cannot reasonably conjecture our destination, but when the final order to move comes, I shall conclude. I think the regiment is to fall back towards Norfolk, although the order would indicate a temporary absence from our present camp. We are to go in light marching order with three day's rations. We can accomplish nothing this side of the Blackwater, and there is not force enough in this whole department to cross it. We must fall back. My heart would almost fail me to see the regiment marching through dust and heat again on another fruitless Blackwater expedition.



The Blackwater River

"The rain pours now, and to-morrow the hot sun will be overhead, with the mud and swollen creeks beneath. And for no purpose! It cannot be – we must be going somewhere other than towards the Blackwater. I have a horror of even the mention of that ignoble stream and impassible barrier. I had rather lead the regiment against three times our own number, than march it again, at this season, to the Blackwater, to Carrsville, to Windsor, to Franklin, to the bridge, and every house this side. But I will not worry. I'll keep my patience and await developments and submit. It is not *right* for us to go out there again; therefore, we will not be ordered to go.

"Oh, how I wish they would order us to Pennsylvania. The 169th would gallantly assist in driving back those Rebels, now devastating that fair region. I picture there all the scenes I have seen in this war –



J. E. B. Stuart, by Don Troiani

families fleeing, soldiers pillaging, and property destroyed. It is brought to the doors of the North, and its horrors those people will appreciate. I hope the Rebels will soon be driven back and made to suffer doubly for their treachery and boldness. Our cause is just and must triumph.

"The rain unceasingly patters upon my board roof, and the sentinel paces in front of my door, his presence being known only by an occasional splash, as he steps in a puddle newly-formed. Think of that soldier, walking up and down in front of my quarters, in a hard rain, for two hours, with nothing but darkness around him. I do not mean around him personally, but the darkness, like a pall, seems to shut him out from the rest of the world and his companions, and alone, he moves up and down, acting thus his part to uphold his country and the cause of liberty. Although in my heart I pity him and would like to send him to his quarters, yet I cannot do it. He might be very useful, and he thus becomes a necessity.

"I have but fifteen men on guard in my camp, while most of the other camps are surrounded with sentinels, 35 and 40 in number. Yet no man leaves this camp without a written pass. I do not restrain him, but if he goes without permission and is caught, he is punished; not other men by putting them on guard."

The 169th made preparations to leave Camp Foster and embark on their new mission, reported in a letter from Adj't. Kisselburgh on the 26th and duly published by the *Daily Times*:

"The One Hundred and Sixty-ninth has again received marching orders, and to-morrow we are off for new fields and scenes of 'brighter brightness and greener green.' – I can't exactly tell where they are, but if I were to give a 'right' smart guess, I should say that when you next hear from us we shall be enjoying the delicious and fragrant atmosphere of the Peninsula, and treading the historic soil whereon so many of our martyred heroes sleep the sleep that knows no waking. The James, the Chickahominy and the Pamunkey, promise to be the theatre of our active operations for a few days to come...

"Tents are to be struck at 7 A.M. to-morrow, and then farewell, oh Suffolk; farewell, the rivers Nansemond and Blackwater; farewell, ye invigorating marches to the banks of the latter stream, where we've stood and popped away at the rebellious heads of the enemy, – 'a long farewell to all thy greatness.' And may everybody be bald-headed ere I shall be called upon to renew your acquaintance."



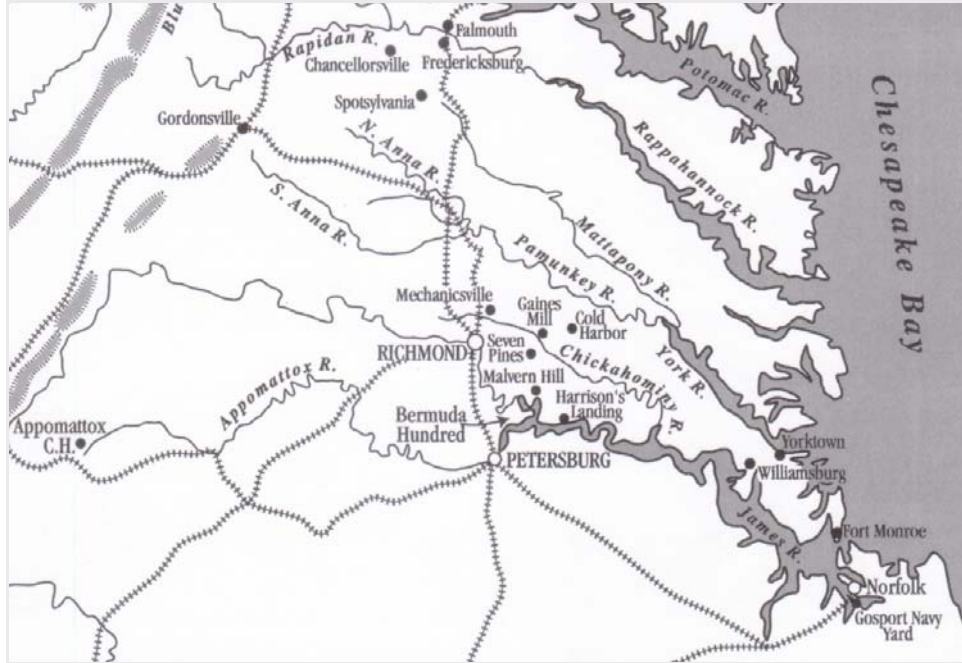
Ruins of the Norfolk Navy Yard, Virginia (December 1864)

Priv. James Caton, Co. D, reported in a letter that the regiment "left camp at Suffolk on the 25th of June and went to Norfolk by rail; from there we took the boat and went to White House Landing." Priv. Carmon complained about the rainy weather during the movement in a continuation of his letter on the 25th:

"We have just got heavy marching orders, but where we will go, I don't know, but I suppose that we will go to Fortress Monroe in the first place. We will have a gay time, for it rains like fun now. It seems impossible for them to move us unless it rains. Bernard Uline sets here eating his dinner and keeps a blowing because they will always march us in the rain."

Gen. Alden explained the purpose of the July expedition in his memoir:

"On the 27th of June, 1863, Major-General John A. Dix, commanding at Fortress Monroe, directed that our army hitherto investing Suffolk and vicinity, should reconnoitre in the direction of South Anna. The objects of this reconnaissance were not published in the general orders, but rumor said it was to divert the enemy from his preconceived plans against Hooker's column in the region of the Rappahannock, burn bridges and otherwise check the advance of the Confederates northerly. The expedition was to be under the command of Brigadier-General



Detail from a map of the rivers of Virginia, published in "Back Door to Richmond – The Bermuda Hundred Campaign, April - June 1864," by William G. Robertson (1987)

George W. Getty. The troops, including the 169th Regiment N.Y.V., embarked on transports and debarked at Whitehouse on the Pamunkey River. This position was regarded as strategic, it being rear of the confluence of the York and the Pamunkey Rivers, and affording an excellent landing for boats of every description, and a good dock for the accommodation of a rich farming country. It was especially desirable under the existing military emergency."



Transport vessels in the mouth of the Pamunkey River at White House Landing, Virginia (May 1864)

The 169th arrived at White House on the 28th, encamping upon the estate of Confederate Brig.-Gen. William H. F. Lee, a son of Robert E. Lee. Gen. Alden would

describe the regiment's new surroundings in a letter to his brother, an extract of which was published in his memoir:

"This is my first effort at letter-writing since our arrival at White-house; and I am now writing under great difficulties, with simply a leaky shelter tent over us, the rain pouring and the wind blowing angrily. We are in the midst of a large clover field of 700 acres, as level as the western prairies, with clover knee-high, the property of General William Fitzhugh Lee. This is part of an estate of 1,100 acres formerly belonging to George Washington."



Presented for your review and contemplation are two interesting, Masonically-influenced architectural monuments located at the village of Menands, N.Y., for 1st Lieut. Charles Dumary, Co. C, and Priv. Dagobert Zeiser, Co. H.



DuMary Vault, Albany Rural Cemetery, Menands, New York

Paula Lemire's blog, "Albany Rural Cemetery – History in Photos," provides the following information about the DuMary Vault:

"This large free-standing vault is located on the South Ridge, just around the corner from the Parson's monument where the road turns from Cypress and leads out to the Cemetery's South Gate.

"The vault's construction actually gives a hint about one of its occupants, Charles DuMary (or Dumary). Born in 1822 in Albany to Irish parents, he appears in the 1850 census records as a stonecutter living in Troy. He enlisted during the Civil War and was eventually promoted to

1st Lieutenant of Company C of the 169th Infantry. Returning to Troy, he resumed his trade and later census records list him first as a marble cutter, then as a master stonecutter. It is very possible that this vault was his own work. He died of Bright's disease in 1879.

"Despite its fortress-like appearance, this vault was the site of one of the Rural Cemetery's worst incidents of vandalism. In June, 1972, someone forced open the doors and pried open several crypts inside. Charles Dumary's crypt was broken open and part of his remains removed from his coffin.



"While the design of this vault is very simple to the point of austerity, it's worth walking around to the side to see this beautiful window."

Charles enlisted on September 6, 1862, as 4th Sergeant, Co. G, and your correspondent's great-great-grandfather, Patrick J. Aylmer, enlisted as 3^d Sergeant in the same company, would have known him well. Kevin Franklin, Historian of the town of Colonie, of which Menands is a part, reveals additional information concerning the desecration and plundering of the mausoleum:

"Word was that a couple of local high school miscreants committed the crime (ca. 1972). One of them took the skull and put it in his bedroom and used it as a candle holder. Police officers were apparently closing in on him when he ditched the skull and a ring taken from the

remains of a female. The doors on this mausoleum were heavily bolted and barred shortly after this incident and remain so today."

The next exhibit is of the monument at St. Agnes' Cemetery for Priv. Zeiser, who was a highly successful merchant in the meatpacking industry after the war. In "St. Agnes' Cemetery, Its Past and Present Associations," by Myron A. Cooney (1899), we find the following biosketch:



Zeiser Obelisk, St. Agnes' Cemetery, Menands, New York

"A tall, graceful column, surmounted by a cross, marks the plat in St. Agnes's cemetery owned by Dagobert Zeiser. It is a commanding site, as the view takes in Troy, the great iron works, a long stretch of the noble Hudson, and in general a magnificent picture of this portion of the Hudson valley. The lofty proportions of the Zeiser monument are conspicuous from nearly every part of the Cemetery. Dagobert Zeiser, who has had such a long and successful career as a merchant, was born in Germany, December 13, 1841, and came to this country at the age of eighteen. He was the son of John Baptist Zeiser and Caroline Miller. When he arrived in Troy he found himself penniless, and so hired out as a farm hand, working for two years. In the fall of 1862, he enlisted in Company H, 169th Regiment, N. Y. V., serving for two years and five months, being honorably discharged from the service on January 5, 1865. He then returned to Troy after a most creditable war record, giving the very best evidence possible of his devotion to his adopted country. He at once engaged in the meat business, with which he has been identified ever since, and in which he has occupied a commanding position. Ever devoted to his business, displaying in all transactions

rare skill, matured experience and unblemished integrity, Mr. Zeiser has won the esteem and confidence of all brought into contact with him in the course of trade. He was married on January 21, 1865, immediately after his return from the war, to Miss Josephine C. Reinhart, and has been blessed with fifteen children, all living except two."



Cheers,

- Steve Wiezbicki

Steven M. Wiezbicki
2733 Amber Waves Lane
Fort Collins, CO 80528
970.689.3526
smw107@columbia.edu
smw700@hotmail.com

<http://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/civil/infantry/169thInf/169thInfMain.htm>
<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nyrensse/169ny2.htm>