
169th New York Infantry Newsletter

October 2012

The Time Traveler.

Take a trip back in time, 150 years ago, with your faithful correspondent, as we visit with the officers and men of the 169th N.Y. in the summer and autumn of 1862.



Freshly enlisted in the New York State Militia, but not yet mustered into the service of the United States, men like the New York soldiers pictured above were eager to head for the seat of war. They did not start the war, but intended to finish it, once and for all.

Volunteers from Rensselaer and Washington counties, with additional men coming from the counties of Warren, Saratoga, Albany, and Columbia, and even from the neighboring states of Vermont, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania, joined a new regiment being formed in Troy, N.Y., in August and September of 1862, to be designated as the 169th New York State Volunteer Infantry Regiment.

Forty men from St. Lawrence County, almost half a company, would join the regiment during its muster-in at Staten Island, N.Y., in October. These men, a surplus from the organization of the 142^d N.Y., were sent from Albany and assigned to Company F of the 169th.



View of Troy from the Watervliet Arsenal (1860)

The regiment was encamped at Camp Corcoran, located on River Street in North Troy. The camp was described at the time as having a "warlike appearance," with a high fence erected in front of the camp and a strict guard maintained at all entrances.

What these new soldiers were to do was explained by the Troy *Daily Whig* on July 24th, 1862:

"It is understood that the regiments now forming in this State and elsewhere in the North, will not be likely to see any fighting in the South before cool weather in the winter or late in the fall. They will be sent to Maryland and Western Virginia, Fortress Monroe and other places, where garrison duty is now being performed, and there take the place of disciplined regiments now wanted in the field. If enough fresh troops were now ready to take the garrisoned places not within reach of the rebels, so that the whole of the disciplined force could join the army now in the field, no doubt Richmond would speedily fall. For the first six months that regiments now recruiting are in the service, they will have a sort of holiday work to perform."

"Holiday work?" In comparison to what the Union army experienced during the fighting retreats of the Peninsula Campaign that summer, perhaps so, but one man from the 169th would die even before leaving Troy, and another came close. The Troy *Weekly Times* reported on September 20th that a recruit from the new regiment was accidentally shot by a comrade at Camp Corcoran, but had "a narrow escape, as the ball grazed his head, causing him to bleed very freely."

On September 25th, the day of the regiment's departure for the front from the village of Batestown in Troy, Forty-four year-old Private Anthony Tredo of Co. G was killed by the Hudson River Railroad Company cars, as reported by the Troy *Daily Times* the next morning. Would Private Tredo's death be an omen for the future of his regiment?

"A sad accident marred the departure of the regiment. A soldier of Capt. [McCoun's] company, named Anthony Tredo, fell, or was pushed, from the platform of one of the cars, when opposite the ruins of the Sixth street church, and was killed. The deceased was seen at the



Civilians Bid Farewell to a Trainload of Infantry Bound for the Front, by G. Grato (1864)
Collection of the National Museum of the United States Army, Fort Belvoir, Virginia

camp just before the train started, and said good-bye to several of his friends. He was perfectly sober, and the accident is not believed to have been the result of his carelessness. The body was carried to the Police station, where Coroner Hall empanelled a jury, of which S. S. Dauchy is foreman. The inquest will be concluded to-night."

The 169th N.Y. was sent into quarters in the Park Barracks at City Hall Park in Manhattan, where it was intended the regiment would be mustered into the service, but circumstances called for a change in venue. As Colonel James A. Colvin would write in his 1880 historical sketch of the regiment, "notwithstanding the most strenuous exertions of the officers, the men took the freedom of the city, and it was decided to seek a 'change of base.' After three days' delay, and by order of Brig.-Gen. Van Vechten, who had made every effort to befriend the regiment, marching orders were published on the evening of September 28th, the objective point being New Dorp, on Staten Island, where the regiment was to go into barracks and complete its muster-in."



**The Temporary Barracks Erected in the Park, New York City,
for the Accommodation of Troops
Published in "Harper's Weekly" (May 11th, 1861)**

1st Lieutenant and Adjutant William E. Kisselburgh provided more details about the small fiasco in New York City in his correspondence to the *Daily Times* on September 28th:

"So we were sent to the Park Barracks, right in the heart of New York city, where it is just as impossible to keep men, as it would be for some officials I write of, to be happy in Heaven. Every regiment that ever remained here over an hour, lost more or less from desertion, and all have taken away with them less men than they brought. Such is the uniform testimony of citizens, and you can well understand how true it is. Our regiment has not suffered in this respect more than others have done, and I only refer to this to confirm the declaration made in Troy, that the unseemly haste with which the unorganized 'organization' was despatched to the 'seat of war,' would eventuate in consequences as deplorable as those which sent us off... Speaking of bounties, reminds me that 'our boys' have been already badly whipped – not by the rebels – but whipped of their money, by the thieves, peddlers and sharks of New York city. About every other one of the privates who had money, has had it stolen from him. Hospital Steward Blair had \$32 stolen from the side pocket of his coat, while passing from the barracks to Lovejoy's Hotel, and others have suffered almost as severely."

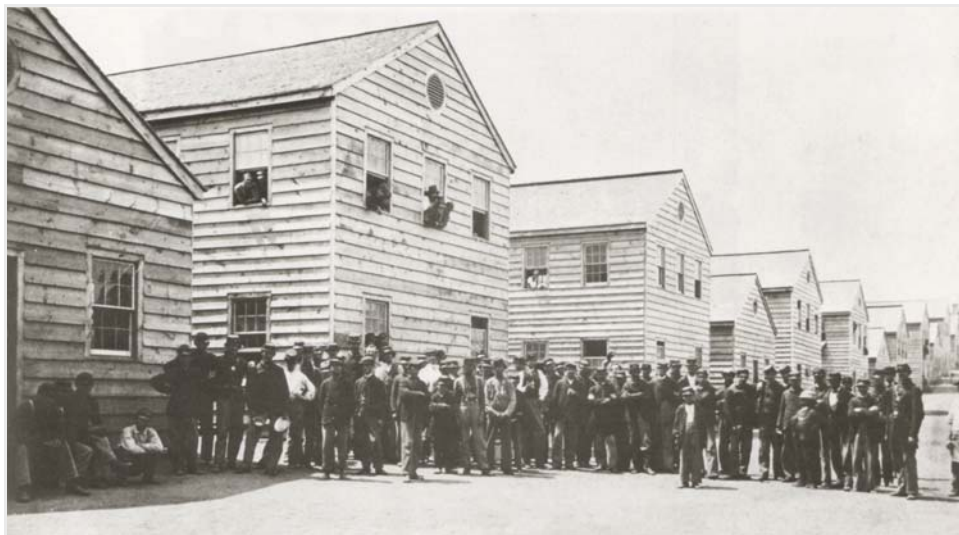
In a letter home to Sand Lake, N.Y., dated October 14th, Private Alfred Carmon, Co. H, wrote of his personal observations on life in the metropolis:

"We were in New York four days. We had great times when we were there! When we were not in the street, we would sit in the windows and talk with almost everybody that went past, and those that would not speak to us, we would 'hello' at them, and the police. We would throw

apples at them! Some of them would get mad at us and then we would laugh at them. So we had a gay time of it."

The evening of September 29th saw the regiment leave Manhattan for Camp Van Vechten at New Dorp, Staten Island, as recounted by Adjutant Kisselburgh in a letter to the *Daily Times*:

"At 7 P.M. we were on board the ferry boat, and a delightful run down the bay – during which 'Old John Brown' suffered inharmonious voices to sing his praises, – brought us to Vanderbilt's Landing, at which point we disembarked. Here we were met by a guide, sent by Gen. Van Vechten to escort us to our destination, and being somewhat interested in the distance before us, I asked him how far it was to Dorp. 'Five miles and a half, sir,' said he. In my blandest style, I asked to 'light up,' but he coolly informed me he couldn't 'see it,' but that I should before we got through. Well, we formed in line, and proceeded along a dusty highway, decked on either side with beautiful and elegant residences, showing the possession of wealth and taste on the part of the occupants, until it grew to be nine, then ten and then eleven o'clock. Many of the men gave out under the burthens of their guns and knapsacks, and laid down on the green sward by the roadside and slept until morning, when they straggled into camp, very much fatigued from their night's experience. Col. Buel pedestrianated at the head of the column, and is a very excellent walker. On the march the men were very clamorous for supper – none had been served them before leaving New York – but when they reached camp they had forgotten the pangs of hunger in the more serious exactions of fatigue incident to so long a march – and in a brief space of time they were all quietly reposing upon soft and luxurious pine bunks, previously erected for the accommodation of other regiments."



Union Army barracks at nearby Fort Richmond, Staten Island, New York (June 29, 1864)

Once ensconced in their new quarters on Staten Island, the men of the 169th proved they were a force to be reckoned with, as revealed by Lieutenant-Colonel John McConihe in a letter dated October 26th:

"Suffice it to say that we remained at New Dorp about three weeks; that the inhabitants prayed night and day for our early departure; that a certain kind of fowl known among soldiers as chickens were fast being

exterminated; that widow women complained of their bees swarming in the night and taking the hive along with them; that fishermen's nets were robbed of their sinkers; and many other unaccountable things happened, which were laid to my 'babes.' Then the soldiers concluded the food was too poor for bounty patriots. A [negro] in the cook house was overheard to remark, 'Anything good enuf for sojer,' and the wrath of nine hundred stalwart men in blue was aroused, and like a whirlwind, a rush was made for said Ethiopian, whose coattails were observed standing straight out as he made a hasty departure up the road, out of sight. 'Down with the cook house' was the cry, when off comes a board, and I rush in, pistol in hand, remarking kindly, 'The next man that disturbs one of those innocent planks will be carried away on it.' This soothes them, and with three cheers for the Lieutenant-Colonel, the men depart to their bunks. With from twenty to thirty men in the prison daily, four or five tied down humanely to keep them from hurting themselves, some 'gagged and bucked,' and many other such little things to look after and amuse myself, the hours flew swiftly by."



The Narrows from Staten Island (ca. 1866-1868)
Jasper Francis Cooke (1823-1900)
Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas

To complete our sojourn into the past, I present a hilarious account of the goings-on in New Dorp by Adjutant Kisselburgh, written in 1864 and included in Brigadier-General Alonzo Alden's 1879 historical sketch of the regiment:

"My dear colonel: – The task you have allotted me of writing the history of events, connected with the sojourn of the 169th N. Y. Vols. at New Dorp, Staten Island, almost staggers me by the remarkable character of those events and the sense of my want of ability to do justice to them. It would require the pen of Russell or the pencil of Hogarth to delineate them as they deserve. In all our experience since that time, wide and varied as it has been, we have met with nothing to equal the two weeks of Bedouin life we spent at camp Van Vechten. No fiercer fights, no more alarming alarms, no such well filled guard houses, have we encountered since. All our campaigning since then has been tame and insipid compared to our experience at New Dorp. Alas! Poor Dorp! We ne'er shall look upon your like again.

"The historian would find in those two weeks delicious tid bits for the public palate – he would revel in an experience at once earthly and pandemoniac and gorge himself to repletion upon a mass of detail that I cannot even touch. He would find springs of humor bubbling up at every footstep; touches of pathos in every sigh of the poor, dear, dead turkeys and chickens that yielded up their precious lives to the stern demands of war; even the bees would make music for his soul as they did honey for the blue clad children of Mars, and there would be no lack of the distillations of Ceres to fire his brain with 'thoughts that burn and words that speak' or vice versa. At the dread hour of eleven o'clock P. M., September 28, 1862, the quiet rural village of New Dorp, consisting of one tavern, one blacksmith shop, one store, and one house that stood upon a hill, with an array of brown wooden barracks for the accommodation of the soldiers, was surprised by the influx of troops. The big housedog at the tavern was the only living thing that was prepared to give them a welcome. But soon, after sundry poundings on the tavern door, the worthy landlord – that is, he was worthy of the place he kept – appeared in *propria persona*, flanked on one side by his wife, partially dressed, and demanded to know the occasion of this rude intrusion. The explanation was laconically given, coupled with a request that supper would be provided with all possible expedition for the officers. Now the straggling column began to arrive in goodly numbers, and having been assured by the landlady that, although her larder was not overstocked, she could at least give us a bit of chicken, some coffee and bread and butter, the officers went to look to the arrangement of the details for the sleeping of the soldiers. That was soon disposed of, and backward we traced our weary steps to the hotel, anxious for the bit of chicken and for another look at the landlady's daughter. The rude adage has it: 'There's many a slip between the cup and the lip,' and so we found it in the case of the supper. During the absence of the officers, the soldiers had insinuated their personal presence into the mysteries of the hotel kitchen and it was sung of them, that:

*Hungry and greedy, thirsty and hot.
Through cellar and garret they flew like a top.
After cold vittals, flew these mad men.
Like so many wretches O, the bad men!
Entered the larder, entered the kitchen.
Drank all the wine and stole all the chicken.*

That's what they did!

"But if the feast to our famished appetites was denied us, we had at least the satisfaction of feasting our eyes with a sight of Sallie, the landlord's daughter. That was her name, a very good name, though I suppose some extra fastidious persons would say Sallie had a bad name. There is no accounting for tastes in this world, very fortunately, and I will not stop to write any essay on names. You remember Sallie, do you not, colonel? Nobody who ever knew Sallie could possibly forget her. A little, stout, fat, dumpy creature was Sallie, with a flaxen head of hair, a pair of red eyes (there's no disputing the color of those eyes), and a tongue that would have furnished good material for the mainspring of a watch. It never run down. Sallie's tongue was always going, and though it never run down, as I have said, it often run down such unfortunate individuals of the two sexes as happened to excite Sallie's animosity. I have had some experience of storms, and if a shipwreck on the Hatteras coast is at all calculated to give one an idea

of what a nor'easter can be sometimes, *I've* got that idea. But oh, for a downright old-fashioned hurricane, just shiver my timbers if I don't think that Sallie had the elements in her to get up a bigger thunder shower than even the elements themselves. That's what Sallie could do! But I had nearly forgotten one of Sallie's 'fortes,' it was the piano forte, and O, how I pitied that poor wind-broken, crazy, disjointed old instrument. Well might it have exclaimed in the language of Patrick Henry. 'Give me liberty, or give me death.' I hope the unfortunate thing has long since been gathered to its fathers. But farewell, Sallie, and farewell the piano forte.



Old Vanderbilt Dock, New Dorp
From a painting by Frederick William Kost (1861-1923)

"The march from Vanderbilt Landing to New Dorp was too memorable to be forgotten. It was the first tramp the regiment undertook. The distance is about seven miles; but as the men had, only a day or two before, received their arms, and as their knapsacks were loaded down with all sorts of odd and useless things, which loving hands had packed in them, it may be presumed that the appearance they made in consequence of excessive fatigue was not over-creditable. Fortunately the whole of the journey was made after nightfall, and few of the sleeping inhabitants along the wayside were aware of the passage of the little army in front of their habitations. Many of the men, unused to marching, gave out, and seeking the shelter of some friendly haystack, lay down in the open air and slept the sleep that knows no bedclothes until the punctual morning sun arose and threw his 'orient beams over the ambient scene.' In the morning the camp was all astir. Guards were stationed around the barracks, with a view to maintaining order and preventing the soldiers from passing without the limits of the camp. Headquarters were established in a building near the general entrance, next to which on one side was the hospital and on the other side the guard house. It was soon discovered that this latter institution was likely to be the most popular resort of the place; for before the curtain of night was drawn around all earthly scenes, it was crammed to its utmost capacity by as worthy a crew as ever got together. Anyone looking within would have discovered a row of soldiers in embryo, bucked and gagged, stuck up against the four walls, and a layer or two more similarly decorated individuals disposed upon the floor. Whiskey

was, as usual, the stimulating cause; for the country around New Dorp abounded in grog shops, and the guards might as well have been placed around the moon for all the use they were in keeping their patriotic fellow soldiers within the prescribed limits. They seemed to understand that it would be their turn the next day to be off duty when they would very naturally have an intense longing to visit the places in interest on the island and if they were exact to-day and carried out their orders, their successors to-morrow might turn the tables upon them and restrain their sight-seeing propensities. It was very much like 'tickle me, Billy, and I'll tickle you,' 'let me out to-day and I'll let you out to-morrow.' So the soldiers had an unlimited license to roam wherever they chose, and no amount of official authority in those early days of the regiment, before the wholesome introduction of discipline applied the corrective, would have been sufficient to have mended matters. Of course all the men were not disposed to disregard the positive orders of the post. Many endeavored to do their duty faithfully and fearlessly, but enough were to be found to disregard every regulation to render the position of the officers one of grave responsibility and their duties most disagreeable, and to make the camp one continual source of turmoil and confusion.



An old farmhouse in New Dorp

"The inhabitants on the island probably retain vivid recollection of this and other regiments quartered among them – especially such of the inhabitants as retired at night with the comforting consolation of an inalienable right to possession of certain chickens, ducks, turkeys and such like punishable commodities of wealth, to awaken in the morning and find themselves left quite poor indeed in this regard. To show how insensible some people may become to the rights of others, I will cite an instance: A certain old lady retired one evening the owner of a hive of bees. These bees had illustrated by their daily lives the lesson impressed with such pertinacity upon the youthful mind: –

*How doth the little busy bee improve the shining hour?
He gathers honey all the day from every opening flower.*

I will do the old lady the justice to believe that she looked upon her industriousness little swarm with a great deal of bee-attitude, and that she contemplated at no distant day the happiness of garnishing her clean, white table spread with a dish of nice new honey and surprising her



Gone Off with the Yankees – A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey – A Scouting Party – An Old Campaigner (ca. 1876)
Edwin Austin Forbes (1839-1895)
Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

delicate internal organism with food fit for the gods. Alas! How was her cup of happiness rudely torn from her lips; for at night the thief came, and regardless of the well known means of defence of the little worker, the bees were killed and the fruits of all their labors carried off. The next night passing by a farm house that stood a little distance from camp, I discovered three men under suspicious circumstances surrounding the house. As I approached them they started on a run; and being myself indisposed to exertion of that character, I dispatched a bullet from my revolver at the head of the nearest one of the party. The winged messenger of death brought him to in a moment, and upon overtaking him I discovered evidences upon his face as numerous little aggregations of flesh that served to add to the interest which attached to him if he did not enhance the beauty of his physiognomy.

"He protested he had been fighting, but it was plain to be seen that before the bees had surrendered as prisoners of war, they had, as an artist would say, touched him off elegantly.

"Muster-in day came at last. It was the sixth day of October, when all the officers and men were to take the oath of office, and sworn in soldiers of the republic. The regiment was broken into column by company and with the new uniforms of the men. The shining arms and the glittering bayonets, it presented all the finer features of the 'glorious pomp and circumstances of war.' The mustering officer passed down the column and inspected each company in its respective order. Then he returned to the head of the regiment and began the ceremony of muster by company. A few in each company, with one exception, refused to swear in. They declared that they would not take the oath

until the back bounties due them had been paid. The officers expostulated, coaxed and threatened by turns. At length, forbearance ceasing to be the immaculate and virtuous being she is represented, the refractory soldiers who for once in their lives declined to 'swear,' were arrested and sent to quarters under guard. They remained in arrest until the next day when having signified a perfect willingness to muster they were all sworn into the service of good old Uncle Sam, and with scarcely an exception have since then faithfully discharged their duty. This tame description fails to give anything like an adequate idea of the excitement occasioned by this little episode. Enough men who, if they had persisted in their determination, refused to muster, to have prevented the organization of the regiment, and this so far gave the affair an interest and importance which might have changed the whole future of the 169th. Already, my dear colonel, I have drawn this sketch to a most inordinate length, and to you who cannot have forgotten the many interesting events which gave to the whole of our Dorpheap experience a tinge of romance, not unmixed with broader features of side-splitting farce, it must be apparent how poorly I have performed the task you desired. Why, there was the mob who threatened to tear down the cook house because a speculating contractor failed to furnish ice cream and jellies as a desert; and the baby that was born in the barracks, and the enterprising dealer in cakes who saw his dough and molasses disappear into the hundred or more spacious reservoirs for salt pork and hardtack without his being able to eliminate from the pockets of the soldiers the proper return of greenbacks. Why, there's a mass of incidents which I might touch upon, had I preserved a diary of our daily experience, but at this late day – September 8, 1864, – two years after the occurrence of all that has been so poorly described, it could hardly have been expected that I should sufficiently remember the 'salients,' as you say at the front, to attach them with my pen with the success that has ever characterized the '169th' when storming the salients of the enemy's works."

(S'd)

W. E. KISSELBURGH,
Adj't. 169th N. Y. V.



Research continues on the gravesites of soldiers from the 169th N.Y., and preparation of a graves register for the regiment is already in-process. The register will include each soldier's roster record, cemetery and gravesite location, date of birth, and date of death. Links to memorial pages from the "Find A Grave" website and other reference sources will also be included. The register will be made available to the public on the New York State Military Museum's webpage for the 169th N.Y.

The number of photographs of gravestones has increased dramatically since the last newsletter, and they will be made available for viewing at a single online source in the very near future.

Below are just a few of the most recent photo acquisitions, submitted for your review and contemplation...



1st Sergeant John H. Williams, Co. E
Caldwell Cemetery, Lake George, Warren County, N.Y.



Corporal Silas H. Rowley, Co. K
Old Lansingburgh Cemetery, Troy, Rensselaer County, N.Y.



Sergeant-Major Thomas H. Gardner
Mountain View Cemetery, Pueblo, Pueblo County, Colo.



Private Robert Taggart, Co. F
Boardman Cemetery, Whitehall, Washington County, N.Y.



Private William W. Wright, Co. C
Honeoye Falls Cemetery, Honeoye Falls,
Monroe County, N.Y.



Private Justin W. Edwards, Co. D
Old Westbrookville Cemetery, Westbrookville,
Orange County, N.Y.

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>