
169th New York Infantry Newsletter

December 2012

The Time Traveler.

Part II.

Your faithful correspondent invites you once again to visit the officers and men of the 169th N.Y., this time at the seat of war, as they man the defenses of Washington, D.C., at Fort Ethan Allen in Arlington, Virginia.



Camp of the 169th N.Y.V., "under the guns" of Fort Ethan Allen, Arlington, Virginia (ca. November, 1862)

Camp Abercrombie, part of the Defenses of Washington, was named after the regiment's division commander, Brigadier-General John J. Abercrombie.

On October 15th, 1862, the 169th N.Y. left Staten Island for Washington, D.C., traveling by rail via the Jersey Shore, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. The memorable journey was recorded by Sergeant Marcus Peck, Co. H, in a letter to his family in Sand Lake, N.Y.:

"We started from our old camp about 10 o'clock, got on board the cars and were soon at the quarantine landing. Here we got on board a steamboat which was to take us to the Jersey shore, a distance of 18 miles. We soon passed Fort Lafayette, then Fort Hamilton, and soon New York city was out of sight. The sea was quite rough and the boat rocked so, the boys staggered like drunken men. It made 2 or 3 of them a little sick. It did not effect me any, however. We soon reached the



**A Regiment Entraining for the Front, Departing for the Seat of War from Jersey City (ca. 1869)
Edward Lamson Henry (1841-1919)**

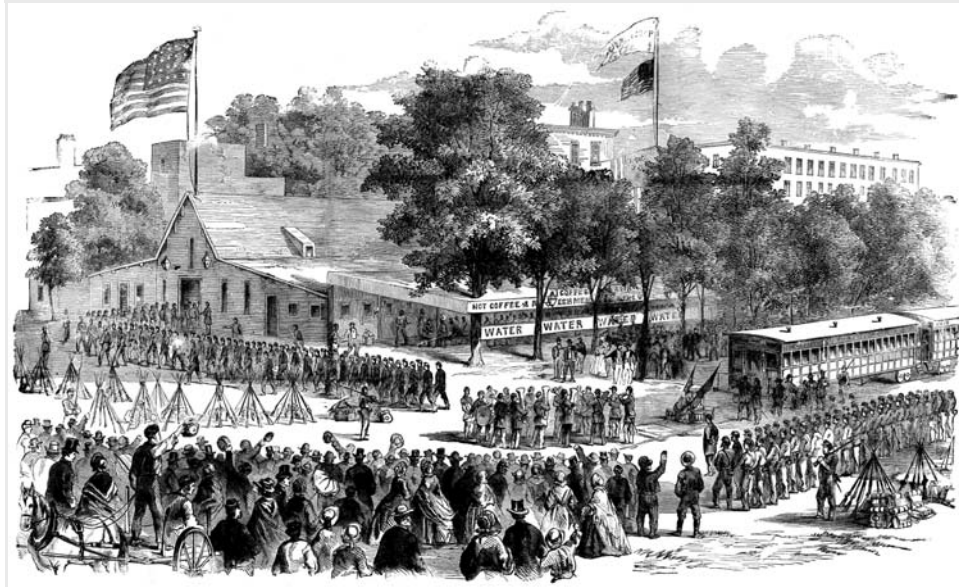
Collection of the Seventh Regiment Fund, Inc., New York

landing where we got our dinner of bread, ham and cheese, and then got on board the cars. We did not start until about four o'clock. While waiting for the cars, a large school of herrings came along swimming very near the top of the water. Some of the men fired into them with revolvers but did not hit any of them. But now the cars were ready to start and we were soon flying off for Dixie's land. We had a chance to see a part of Jersey before dark. There was some poor looking land and some good. We passed two melon patches and we looked at them with wishful eyes, but the cars soon left them far in the rear. Eleven o'clock at night and the lights of Philadelphia came into view. As soon as we landed we formed into line and marched to the volunteer refreshment saloon and got a good supper free of charge."

1st Lieutenant and Adjutant William E. Kisselburgh described the welcome in Philadelphia in greater detail in a letter published by the *Troy Daily Times* on October 23^d:

"The Quaker City was reached at 11 P.M., as I have said, and as the ferry boat conveying the regiment neared the Washington street wharf, a solitary gun announced to the ladies and gentlemen connected with that noblest of all organizations, 'the Cooper Shop Soldier's Relief,' that another call would soon be made upon their generous and hospitable souls, in the way of providing refreshments for the wearied and hungry soldiers of the Republic. By what magic spell or incantation this noble band was brought, at that late hour, from the repose of the night, so suddenly to the headquarters of their Society, I am unable to say; but before we were fairly landed, an *avant courier* met us and announced the pleasing fact that 'supper was ready.' The stomachs of the men bounded for joy, – and when we got in sight of the clean and well-filled tables, the smoking coffee, and the other *et ceteras* of that delicious spread, it was a recompense for every sigh, a balm for every pain.

"I would like much to 'write up' the 'Cooper Shop,' but space will not permit. The object is well known. Some of the details may be briefly stated: Mr. Cooper, the proprietor of a cooper shop near the ferry, was the proprietor, and began with only the simplest contrivances and most



**Arrival and Departure of Federal Soldiers, on Their Way to the "Front,"
at the Union Volunteer Refreshment Saloon
Published in "The Soldier in Our Civil War, Volume I" (1890)**

inadequate means. The great number of troops passing through Philadelphia soon convinced him that more extensive preparations were necessary, and after presenting the matter to a few friends, he was met with such generous responses that he determined to organize a Society 'for the war.' This was a little more than one year ago, and since then over 180,000 troops have been fed by his shop by the association, at an expense of only ten cents per man. Considering the very superior fare given, I marvel at the system which has produced such grand results at so slight a cost."

Sergeant Peck continues with his narrative:

"Supper over, we marched about a mile and got on board again. And now began our soldiers' life in earnest. Instead of passenger's cars, we had baggage cars to ride in all the way to Washington. About daylight we saw the first guard stationed on the track to guard it from the Rebels. They were three in number and they had a little tent by the side of the track. These guards were strung all along about three miles apart and at the ends of every bridge. We reached Baltimore about one o'clock, marched through a part of the city to where the cars were waiting for us. When we got there they were loaded with another regiment and were about ready to start for Washington. So we stacked arms on the sidewalk near the depot, washed ourselves and marched to the Soldiers' Relief Association rooms, where we got a very good dinner and then went back to our arms and stood all the afternoon on the sidewalk. After supper, we went into the depot and made up our beds on the floor and laid down for the night. A pretty place to sleep in a depot, with the engines a tooting and ringing and running all night, yet I slept well.

"We had the pleasure of seeing 11 cars full of rebel prisoners come in. They were a hard looking set, no two were dressed alike, some of them were a little ragged, but a majority of their clothes were tolerable good. I saw one who had a new pair of boots on and one who had a good pair of India rubber boots. Some of them were wounded and they smelt very bad. One of them said if he got back he would fight for the South as long as he lived. Others I thought by their talk, were tired of fight-



Prisoners from the Front (1866)
Winslow Homer (1836-1910)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

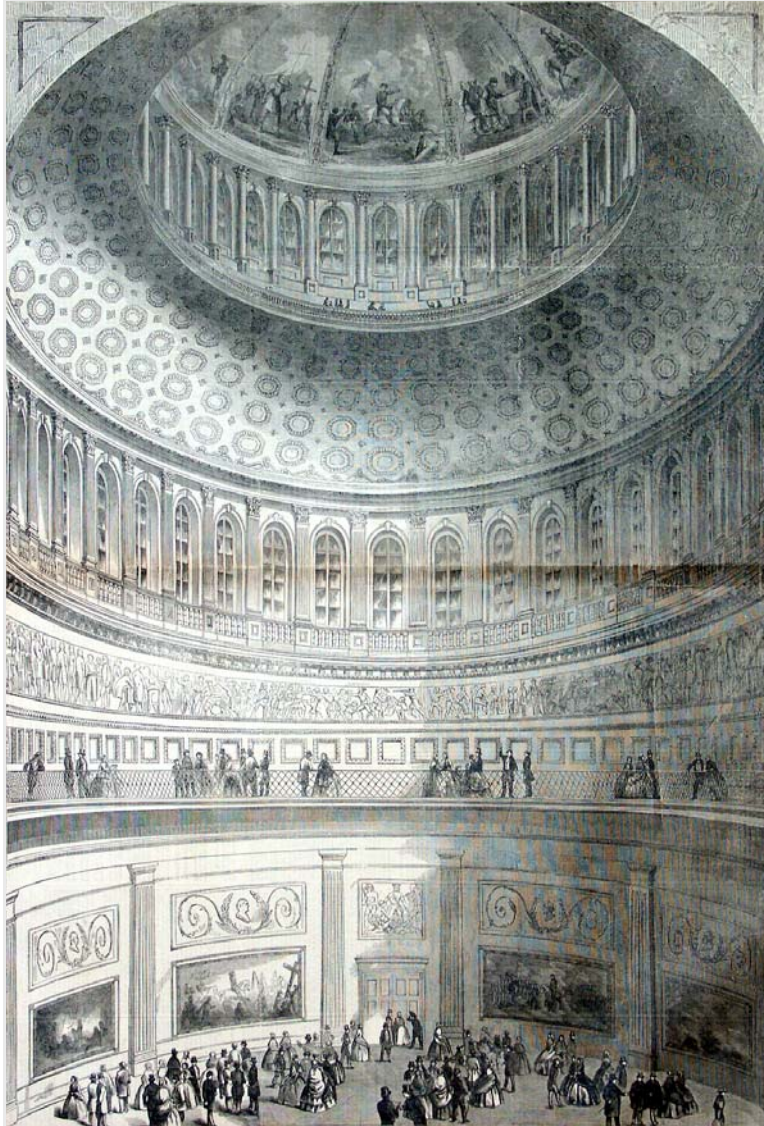
ing. They were taken at the battle of South Mountain; where they were going I do not know. There was about 400 of them."

Sergeant James B. Randall, Co. F, writing to his family in Livingston County in western N.Y., also wrote of his observations of the Confederate prisoners:

"I forgot to mention one thing we saw in Baltimore. The night we were there, there was 192 prisoners arrived there. They were enough to sicken a person to look at them; they were clothed so poorly and they were so dirty above all. I had to leave before I could see them all, on the account of their being so badly wounded. Some with wounds in legs, arms, bodies, and heads. It was a dreadful sight for me to see. I hope that I will never have to witness another such a sight again in my short life. They have been prisoners for weeks and they say they have been used well and hope soon to be exchanged. They said that they were glad to see us, for they would have more to kill of us Yankees. Wasn't this provoking? If they were not cripples, I could have seen them all shot in one moment."

More from Sergeant Peck...

"Baltimore is another dirty looking city, plenty of Darkies were there driving carts, most of them slaves. As Dick and myself were returning from our look at the Rebels, Major Alden met us and said he wanted us to go over and help set the tables and pour out the coffee. We had all we could eat and got our canteens filled with coffee... About nine o'clock we started for Washington and now the train proceeded with caution and the guards along the tracks were more plenty and nearer each other. We did not reach Washington until sunset. After supper we went into the barracks and lay down for the night. When we got up in the morning the eaves of the building dripped as though it had been raining, but it was nothing but the heavy dew. After breakfast I strolled



**Interior of the New Dome of the Capitol at Washington
Published in "Harper's Weekly" (March 9, 1861)**

around the place, and oh the sights that I have seen! Soldiers, cannon, and tents scattered here and there and everything that looks like war. I saw the Pennsylvania Bucktails; each man had a deer's tail stuck in his cap for a feather. I now turned my steps towards the Capitol. I entered the yard and walked up the steps of this immense building. I entered the first room; it is a circular room and I could look way up, almost to the top of the dome. The room was hung with pictures about ten by twelve feet in size. The pictures were the landing of Columbus, the landing of the Pilgrims, the surrender of Cornwallis, the Declaration of Independence, and others of the Revolution. I can say I have been in the National Capitol; it is a beautiful place. We started after dinner for our encampment, marched by Old Abe's White House, but I did not see Old Abe... While we were marching by, a Darcy came out and said the Secretary of State wanted to know what regiment we were. We reached our camp about dark. It is on the hill opposite the Chain Bridge. We are close by Fort Ethan Allen, which has 27 guns and 5 mortars."



Map of the Defenses of Washington, 1861-1865

Encamped in northern Virginia, the men of the 169th slept in small shelter tents for the first three nights before moving to the larger tents of Camp Abercrombie. They could see the dome of the Capitol, just seven miles away, and hear the cannon fire of the opposing sides, about 10-12 miles to the southwest. Adjutant Kisselburgh described the scene upon the regiment's arrival:

"We are now located under the guns of Fort Ethan Allen, with thousands of troops all around us, and encampment upon encampment looming up over the distant hills as far as the eye can reach. Sigel with his corps lay to the left of us – McClellan to the right, and we are thus in supporting distance of either one as they may need our services. The enemy are not many miles distant, and during some of the late skirmishes the reports of the opposing cannon were plainly heard at Fort Ethan Allen. Thus you will perceive that whilst our situation is not at all dangerous, it is pleasantly exciting, not to say romantic... Our



Detail from Topographical Map of Washington, D.C., and Vicinity,
 showing the Union Forts and Defences built from 1861 to 1863
 Robert Knox Sneden (1832-1918)
 Collection of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia

Camp Abercrombie was located on the hill designated by the red dot.

camp to-night, although it is the calm and holy Sabbath eve with you, resounds with the boisterous laugh, the ribald joke, mingled now and then with an outburst of profanity. All this is very shocking, but will soon be stopped, if there is virtue in discipline. In the distance I hear the voices of a few more piously inclined, who with our most worthy chaplain, are singing praises to the Most High."

Lieutenant-Colonel John McConihe, a veteran officer of the 1st Nebraska Volunteer Infantry in the first year of the war, took a more tactical view of the 169th's mission in a letter to friends in Cincinnati:

"We are camped within supporting distance of Fort Ethan Allen, which is a very strong mud fort, and in case of an attack we are to man the rifle pits. I hope no attack will be made to-night, for it has rained so hard all day, that the 'pits' are full of water, and I fear many of the men would be like poor Peggie – strangled. But if an attack is made in fair weather, such time as the 169th will make in getting into these ditches will not be found on record in military manœuvres.

"We are in General Abercrombie's division, and one Jenkins's brigade. General Abercrombie is too old and discreet to hurry us forward before we are ready... McClellan is on our right at Harper's Ferry and Sigel is on our left.

"Thus the 169th is within supporting distance of either, as we may be needed. I do not candidly think we shall get to Richmond before the 1st of November. The rain of to-day will prevent the 169th from moving for a day or two. Our general is a fine soldier and an excellent man, and it is said has taken a great fancy to us. Chain Bridge is but a short distance from here, and if the Rebels get into those ditches before we do, the only road left open is over said bridge, direct to Washington city. So you may rest assured we are not surrounded or likely to starve."



View of Chain Bridge on the Maryland side of the Potomac River, looking south towards Virginia

In addition to tending to the defenses of Fort Ethan Allen, the 169th was responsible for guarding the Chain Bridge, so-called because it was a chain-suspension bridge in earlier incarnations. The regiment helped build the military road connecting Fort Ethan Allen with Fort Marcy, which was to be used for rushing reinforcements from one fort to the other in the event of an attack. Picket duty towards enemy lines to the south held a greater promise of excitement for the men, at least until the arrival of the cold weather and snow. Adjutant Kisselburgh explained everything to the inquiring families of the men back home in a letter published in the *Troy Daily Times* on November 5th:

"Since our arrival at Camp Abercrombie, a bleak hillside, whereon old Æolus doth often 'blow his horn' in strange and mighty frenzy, regardless of the dust he raises, our regiment, by order of Gen. Abercrombie, has been engaged in the pleasant exercise of doing fatigue duty. Perhaps some unmilitary readers may not exactly know the meaning of the term, and may suppose it has relation to a general 'lying around loose' of the soldiers when not engaged in the more bloody work of war. Be sure our boys look at it in quite a different light. Fatigue duty is to sling an axe, or a pick, or a shovel, over one's back, and go out in the woods, and fell the sturdy trees of the forest, or into the rifle-pit, and dig and delve with all your might. That's fatigue duty, and very fatiguing it is, too. Strange terms, we military gentlemen, give to everything we do. The immediate object of all this work is to connect Forts Ethan Allen and Marcy, by means of rifle-pits, with one another, thus enabling reënforcements to be sent from one fort to the other under cover from the enemy's fire, in case of an attack.

"Last week, four of the companies, C, (Capt. Allen,) D, (Capt. Coleman,) F, (Capt. Vaughn,) and I, (Capt. Murnane,) under Lieut.-



Men of the 170th N.Y. in the field on picket duty

Col. McConihe, went on picket duty on the line of the Leesburg turnpike. The duty was novel to our boys, and the companies turned out with very full ranks, every man being anxious to accompany the expedition. They remained out two days, and returned to camp very highly pleased with their initiation into the mysteries of the picket. A member of Capt. Allen's company, Cyrenus Newcomb, a refugee from Virginia, driven away over a year ago for his undying love of the Union, who accompanied the picket guard, passed by his vacant domicile, and stopped for a moment to look at its old familiar face. What emotions were his as he looked upon his desolate home, I will not attempt to portray."

Private Robert Whitcomb, Co. D, summed up the situation in a letter to his parents in Sandy Hill, (now Hudson Falls), N.Y.: "They say the enemy is a coming this way, but they never can take this place. I wish you could come out here and see this place, the forts and fortifications, and they are still digging and chopping."

Private Theodore Schutt, Co. A, explained the unique methods used by the 169th for guard duty in a letter published in the Troy *Daily Whig* on December 25th:

"Some very ludicrous mistakes often occur when the Grand Rounds make their nocturnal circuit of the sentinel's beat, which is between the hours of 12 and 1 o'clock. The Guard Rounds consist of the Officer of the Day, Sergeant of the Guard, and sometimes two or more members of the guard. On the approach of the Guard Rounds, the sentinel gives the usual challenge, 'Halt! Who comes there?' and receives the reply, 'Guard Rounds,' – when he says – 'Advance, Sergeant, and give the countersign.' A few nights since, while the writer was on guard – and it was a bitter cold night – a Hibernian friend, of rather eccentric habits



The Picket Guard in the Army of the Potomac
 Published in "Harper's Weekly" (February 14, 1863)

and speech, occupied the post adjoining, and on the approach of the Officer of the Day, gave the usual challenge, and received the reply, 'Guard Round.' 'Advance, Guard Rounds, and *give me me bitters*, I'm cowl'd,' returned the benumbed sentinel, in the Celtic accent. Considering the strict formality and gravity usually observed on the occasions, this request must have astonished the Guard Rounds a little, but the weather and other circumstances considered, the delinquent escaped the Guard House and Court Martial, though not a severe reprimand. Upon another occasion, a sentinel whose memory was decidedly bad, perpetrated the following – 'Come on, *Ground Rinds*, and give the countersign.' While Co. A were on picket two weeks since – where great strictness and precision are required of the sentinel at night, in challenging, and the challenged party is fired upon if he does not halt promptly, – Captain Colvin suddenly emerged from the woods upon one of his pickets, when he was promptly challenged, answering, 'A friend with the countersign,' the sentinel in vain racked his brains for the 'Advance, friend, and give the countersign,' and after a little stuttering, shouted, impatiently, 'By ___ , friend, I've forgot it, come on with your sign!'"

A favorite topic for the soldiers to write home about was the local cuisine:

"We have fresh beef two days out of five, plenty of corned beef and pork and bacon, beans, bread, coffee and sugar, and tea once a week. In fact, everything is all well enough, only being away from home and



Life in the Camp – Preparing for Supper
 Published by Currier & Ives, New York (1863)

the ones we love, but the day will come when we can do as we please, I hope." – *Private Robert Whitcomb, Co. D.*

"We have lots to eat; there has not been a day yet but we have had plenty to eat. We have first-rate, good bread, and tell grandmother that butter that she sent us tasted good on our bread. – *Sergeant George M. Whitcomb, Co. D.*

"This is what they do with new troops down this way. Here we have had poor food, but this cannot be helped, for it is impossible for food to be kept here long for it is so warm in the day. But as soon as night comes, then we have to put on our overcoats to make us comfortable, which is almost impossible." – *Sergeant James B. Randall, Co. F.*

"We have very good grub here. They give us rice, sugar, beans, pork or beef, coffee, and bread every day. We cook by companies now. Henry Feathers is our cook. / This morning, I cooked potatoes and fried pork for breakfast, so we made out quite a breakfast. / We cook pure beefsteak, but don't have the butter to put on it as you do up home." – *Private Alfred Carmon, Co. H.*

"Rabbits and partridges abound here. The woods and undergrowth are full of them, and between the hours of duty many of the soldiers go out in quest of game, wherewith to enrich the plainer repast supplied by Uncle Sam." – *1st Lieutenant and Adjutant William E. Kisselburgh.*

Sergeant Peck and his men discovered the best strategy for eating properly:

"Last Sunday I had got quietly seated in the colonel's tent, waiting for a meeting to begin, when the order came for Company H to get ready to go and guard the Chain Bridge for 48 hours. Of course, I had to leave the comfortable quarters of the colonel and shoulder my gun and blankets and go with the company. It was a cold windy day, something

like a fall day in the North. We had to leave twelve men at each end of the bridge, with a lieutenant, a sergeant and two corporals, while six men with two corporals were sent farther on up the Potomac to guard a large building of commissary stores, and Sergeant Peck and Corporal Young, with a squad of six men, were sent still farther on to a slaughterhouse to guard the beef which was there. We had a good place for daytime; we did not have to guard but only while the butchers were gone to dinner and then one man was sufficient. At night, two men were on guard, two hours on and four off. I would set up until midnight to get out the relief, and then Corporal Young would take charge the remainder of the night, and I could lie down in the tent and sleep till morning. We had a fire by a large rock a little distance from the tent, and a mess pan and a large piece of fine salt, which the old guard had left there, and nights had all the fried beefsteak we could eat. We also got some tallow of the butcher to grease our boots with. They kill about 15 head of cattle there every day except Sundays, and all for the soldiers. We had to stay two nights. In the daytime we would roam around to see what we could see."

When not on fatigue, guard, or picket duty, the men were trained by the officers in military drills, formations, and parades. The regiment was reported to be in "good condition" according to the *Troy Daily Times* on October 29th, which went on to say that "its condition had improved amazingly since its stay in Virginia. It is now an orderly and well-disciplined organization."



1st Vermont Brigade drilling outside Washington, D.C. (1862)

The weather was another popular topic, not surprising since many of the men were farmers back home. But when an early and severe winter struck in November, it caused hardship for everyone in the regiment, regardless of background. The adjutant wrote about an early storm on November 7th in a letter for the *Daily Times*:

"A snow storm in November, on the seventh day of the month, in the year of grace of 1862, and in Virginia too, who would have thought it? Of course, the men suffered severely, for many of the tents failed to afford protection from the storm, and after becoming thoroughly saturated, many a poor fellow took a very unwilling *ducking*."



Reveille on a Winter Morning (ca. 1868)

Henry Bacon (1839-1912)

Collection of the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York

"Seeing how inadequate the tents were for the protection and comfort of the men, Col. Buel at once reported them to Gen. Abercrombie, and asked that a Board of Survey might be appointed to examine them, with a view to their condemnation. His request was granted, and yesterday a commission inspected them, who have already made a report condemning them as totally unfit for service. Upon the strength of the report, we expect an exchange in a few days."

Colonel McConihe humorously took issue with the false promises of the recruitment posters in Troy in a letter on the 9th:

"Nothing has transpired in camp to immortalize the 169th, except that we are obeying orders and laying as quiet as the cold will permit. I have advised some of the officers that I should prefer charges against them for misrepresentation, in that they headed their posters in Troy, 'Ho! for the Sunny South!' and that thereby myself and others were induced to enlist, and we don't see the 'Sunny South.'"

Winter quarters were constructed by the men in late November, and Sergeant Peck described the arrangements for Company H in a letter on December 14th:

"Pete, here is a rough sketch of my house. The shanty, where the man stands in the door, is our cook house. It is a kind of a log cow stable sort of thing, which we built ourselves. The third tent from the cook house is where I live. You see we have a step to get into our house; there is also a step on the inside so we can step down with ease. The top or roof is a tent fastened onto the poles. The tents I have made are on the right hand side of our street as you go up from the cook house. The cook house is at the foot of the street, and at the head are the tents of the captain and lieutenants. The dark places in the tents are the



Sketch of winter quarters, Co. H, 169th N.Y.V.,
Camp Abercrombie, Virginia (December 14, 1862)
Sergeant Marcus Peck, Co. H

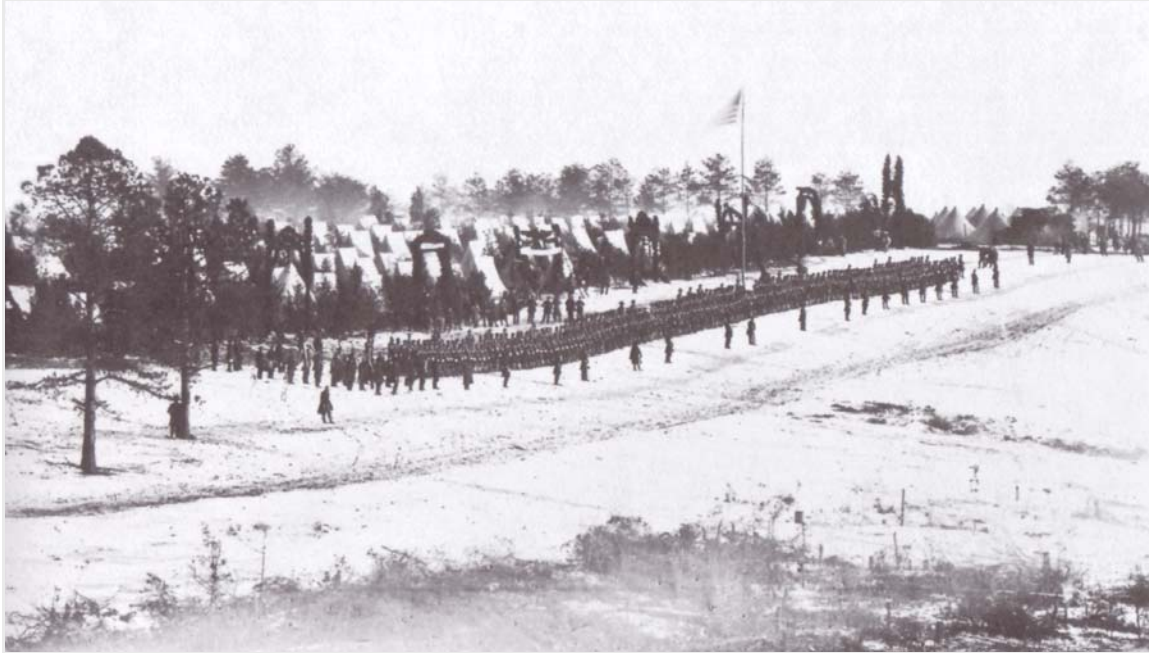
doors or entrances. They are open as I have made them; they can be drawn together with strings, so that they will be tight."

The first fatality in the regiment due to sickness was that of Sergeant Orville Broughton, Co. E, on November 18th. In a letter written on Christmas Eve, Sergeant Randall mentioned the death of Private Albert Keech, Co. F, on December 20th, and warned that the regiment "had two more that were not expected to live the week out." Private John Riley, Jr., Co. D, died on December 28th; Private David Crandell, Co. C, January 5th; Private Josiah Williams, Co. E, January 11th; and Private John Mills, Co. E, January 22^d.

Thanksgiving, November 27th, was a holiday for the State of New York, including the 169th, and most of the men were given leave for the day. George and Robert Whitcomb visited the capital for dinner with visiting friends, and a large number of the men visited Camp Chase at Arlington Heights, where the 125th N.Y., also from Troy, had just arrived from Chicago the night before. Sergeant Peck wrote that the men of the 125th "gave a hurrah and rushed to meet them." Private Carmon also wrote about meeting his fellow Trojans:

"I went over to the 125th regiment and I saw lots of the boys. I saw George Frith, Peter Fry, Cornelius Wilkinson, and the rest of the boys from Sand Lake. Bob – he is in the hospital, and so is Morgan Upham. The boys are all well and happy. They was in camp only four miles from us. They left there the day before yesterday on the road to Manassas, out on the front lines. The boys didn't like to go. They think that it will go hard with them."

As Christmas approached, the 169th prepared for its first brigade review and inspection. The *Troy Daily Times* reported "The brigade was reviewed by Gen. Abercrombie at Hall's Hill, and although it was the first time the regiments had been together, they marched with the steadiness of veterans, and for their fine appearance were highly complimented by the reviewing officer. Col. Buel assumed command of the brigade on that day for the first time." Sergeant Peck



2^d Maine Infantry Regiment, Camp James, Defenses of Washington (1861)

described the event in a letter to his little brother, Munson, nicknamed "Mush":

"On Tuesday, the 23^d of December, the above-named regiments went out to Hall's Hill, which is two miles from camp, for the purpose of brigade review and inspection. Colonel Buel was in command of the brigade, and we were reviewed and inspected by Brigadier-General Abercrombie. Early on that morning, there was a commotion in the company streets of the 169th. Such a scouring of guns and polishing of brass, blacking of boots, and brushing of clothes, you never did see, as everyone wished to appear in his best. It was quite a sight to see a whole brigade drawn up for review. I wish the young ones could have seen it. Mush, it would have made your eyes stick out!"

Christmas day was celebrated in grand style by the regiment, with athletic contests and a mock trial of the officers, as reported by Sergeant Peck:

"The performances for the day was first, hurdle race; second, sack race; third, foot race; fourth, wrestling match; fifth, picking up 50 stones placed three feet apart; sixth, climbing a greased pole; seventh, catching a shaved and greased pig; and last, a mock dress parade. The prize for the winners was two dollars for all but the pig; the prize for catching him was the pig itself. The prize for the hurdle race was won by a member of Co. G; the sack race, by Co. E; the foot race, by Co. C; the wrestling, by Co. E; the picking up the stones, by Ben Bentley, Company H; the greased pole, by a [negro], and the pig – I don't know who did get him, as the whole regiment engaged in the chase. Some three or four claimed him, I believe, but the mock dress parade beat the whole. The officers, field and staff, commissioned and non-commissioned, had to be privates, and the privates, officers. Old Strausburgh was one of our sergeants and the rest of the officers were of the same stamp. Major Alden, Adjutant Kisselburgh, and some of the other officers were placed upon a box in front of the line with a guard around them, to be tried by court martial, for some offence which they had committed. The whole thing was made to appear as comical and ludi-



St. Patrick's Day in the Army – A Hurdle Race (March 17, 1863)
Edwin Austin Forbes (1839-1895)
Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

crous as could be. All just for fun, and it was funny. I cannot describe it. But you will probably see an account of it in the *Troy Daily Times*. Thus passed off Christmas. It will long be remembered by the officers and men of the 169th."

The *Daily Times* reported that the officers of the 169th Regiment "gave their men a grand Christmas dinner, with all the 'fixins.'" A barrel of hospital stores and "delicacies for the use of the sick," sent by a few ladies of Troy, arrived just in time Christmas morning. To complement the official arrangements, Sergeant Randall and his friends had special plans for their Christmas dinner:

"Now let me tell you what I am going to have for Christmas, which is tomorrow. First, we have a corporal that has got his wife with him, and he has got a good cook-stove with him and he is our sutler; that is, for our company. She makes pies and biscuits and everything, so my tent-mates engaged three tins of biscuit and I furnish the butter and honey, so you know what a Christmas dinner we will have. Welch is coming down too. We are to have a big time to-morrow. The city of Troy has sent a dinner for the regiment. I wish you all a merry Christmas at home."

Major Alonzo Alden remembered this Christmas day in his memoirs, including an account of the visit to the regiment by his friend, Major-General James A. Garfield, who would later become the 20th President of the United States:

"Christmas day of 1862 for the officers and men of the 169th Regiment, N.Y.V., was a double holiday. Besides the joys of a holiday, our regiment was highly honored by the presence, as our distinguished guest, of Major-General James A. Garfield. Major Alden was a particular friend of General Garfield at Williams College. The general had resigned his commission in the army to enable him to accept the responsibilities of a member of Congress, to which he had been overwhelmingly elected to represent the district of his home at Mentor, Ohio. By a contribution among the officers, an extensive supper of chicken, oysters, etc., was prepared for the regiment, and various

sports were inaugurated which caused the day to be spent very pleasantly. Colonel Buel, who was then our brigade commander, prepared an excellent dinner for the officers of the regiment. Major-General Garfield made a ringing and complimentary speech."

There would be more excitement for the men before the year was out. The *Troy Daily Times* provided the particulars of a cavalry raid near Washington's defenses on December 28th and 29th, led by Confederate Major-General J.E.B. Stuart, from a letter by Adjutant Kisselburgh:



Stuart's Christmas Raid – Generals J.E.B. Stuart, Fitzhugh Lee, and Major John Pelham, Fairfax Courthouse, Virginia, December 1862, by John Paul Strain

"The raid by Stuart's cavalry within our lines, and of which you have doubtless been apprised by telegraph, created no little excitement at this point, and the troops in the vicinity of Chain Bridge have been anxiously awaiting an attack from these bold and dashing marauders for two days past. On Sunday night at 11 o'clock, an orderly from Gen. Abercrombie's headquarters came into camp with dispatches from the General informing Col. Buel that the enemy were at Burke Station, a point twelve miles from here, and ordering the brigade commanded by Col. Buel under arms. In accordance with this order, the Fourth New York Artillery, One Hundred and Eighteenth, One Hundred and Fifty-second, and One Hundred and Sixty-ninth New York Regiments were aroused from their slumbers, and directed to occupy the rifle-pits and Forts Ethan Allen and Marcy with all possible despatch. The regiments turned out rapidly and soon occupied their appropriate stations to resist an attack that might be made. Gen. Abercrombie with another brigade started in pursuit of the rebels, but failed to come up with them in time to check their audacious advance. Col. Buel's brigade remained under arms until 7 A.M. Monday, when the troops were sent to their quarters with instructions to be ready to fall in line at a moment's notice. Various rumors, of the whereabouts of Stuart and of the numbers and character of the forces with him, reached us during the day, but no further alarm occurred until Monday night about 6 o'clock, when an old farmer from Lewinsville came within our lines, driving his cattle before him, to save them, as he said, from falling into the hands of the rebels, with whom our forces had had a fight a short distance beyond his residence. This was a startling bit of news, and possibly indicated an approach upon this point by way of the Leesburg turnpike. The brigade

was at once placed under arms, and held so while Col. Buel and Capt. Vaughn of the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth, rode up in the direction of Lewinsville to ascertain more particularly the whereabouts of the enemy. They returned in about two hours, and reported the rebels retiring, when the regiments were for a second time dismissed."

Sergeant Randall provided the enlisted man's perspective of the action:

"It is but a short time since I wrote home, but for all of that I must write you a few lines this morning in order to let you know how near we came to having a fight on Sunday night and Monday morning. We were called out a few minutes before 12 by the cry of, 'Fall in, Company F!' Soon we were in line and each man had his forty rounds given him, and then each captain took his respecting companies and marched us to the rifle pits, and there we were in the cold until daylight. The night was extremely cold and the reason of this was we had a report of Stuart's Cavalry being within nine miles of us. This in fact was so as we have since found out, but this is not all.

"Last night we were again called out at 8 o'clock and took possession of the rifle-pits and kept them until morning. When we were called out we could hear heavy guns in the distance and then all expected an engagement, but we returned again this morning without seeing a shell. We are kept in readiness for a minute's call."

Sergeant Peck kept his cool while Private Conrad Amblinger, Co. H, would feel the rush of adrenaline in his blood:

"Sunday afternoon we got back to camp sleepy and tired. We had just got to sleeping nicely about ten o'clock at night, when we were aroused by our captain's voice out in the street. "Fall in now, every man, with your guns, knapsacks and canteen haversacks; everything [illegible]." Such veteran soldiers as we were, all knew what was a coming. We had to rouse up and out of our warm bed, pack our blankets and sling our knapsacks on our backs and get into line as fast as we possibly could. They thought they would scare us this time and they commenced dealing out the cartridges to us, as though we had really got to go into battle. Amblinger came to me and said, "Where we go Marcus, where we go?" Amblinger was a little scared I guess. But we were not yet through with the performance and had to double-quick out to our rifle-pits, (which were about a quarter of a mile off), and stay there till morning. The night was cold and we had to double-quick once in awhile to keep warm. When morning dawned we marched back to camp, got our breakfast and I lay down and slept all the forenoon. The whole brigade was ordered out by the general simply because there was a report that Stuart's Cavalry were somewhere within 25 or 30 miles of us. Great cry, but little wool. There was a man of the 118th N. Y. shot accidentally that night in the rifle-pit. The next morning it came out in the Washington papers that he belonged to the 169th, but it was a mistake."



Version 1.0 of the graves register is nearly complete, with hundreds of graves having been located out of a total of 1,700. Photographs have been collected for about half of them so far, with a few shown below for you to ponder...



1st Sergeant John F. Fleming, Co. B
Dayton National Cemetery, Dayton,
Montgomery County, Ohio



Private John Jordan, Co. G
Bath National Cemetery, Bath,
Steuben County, N.Y.



Corporal Thomas Rann, Co. F
Cypress Hills National Cemetery, Brooklyn,
Kings County, N.Y.



Musician Thomas R. Knight, Co. H
Boardman Cemetery, Whitehall,
Washington County, N.Y.



Corporal John N. Payne, Co. E
Beaufort National Cemetery, Beaufort,
Beaufort County, S.C.



Private Moses D. Fredenburg, Co. K
Forest Cemetery, Coeur d'Alene,
Kootenai County, Idaho

Cheers,

- Steve Wiezbicki

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<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nyrensse/169ny2.htm>