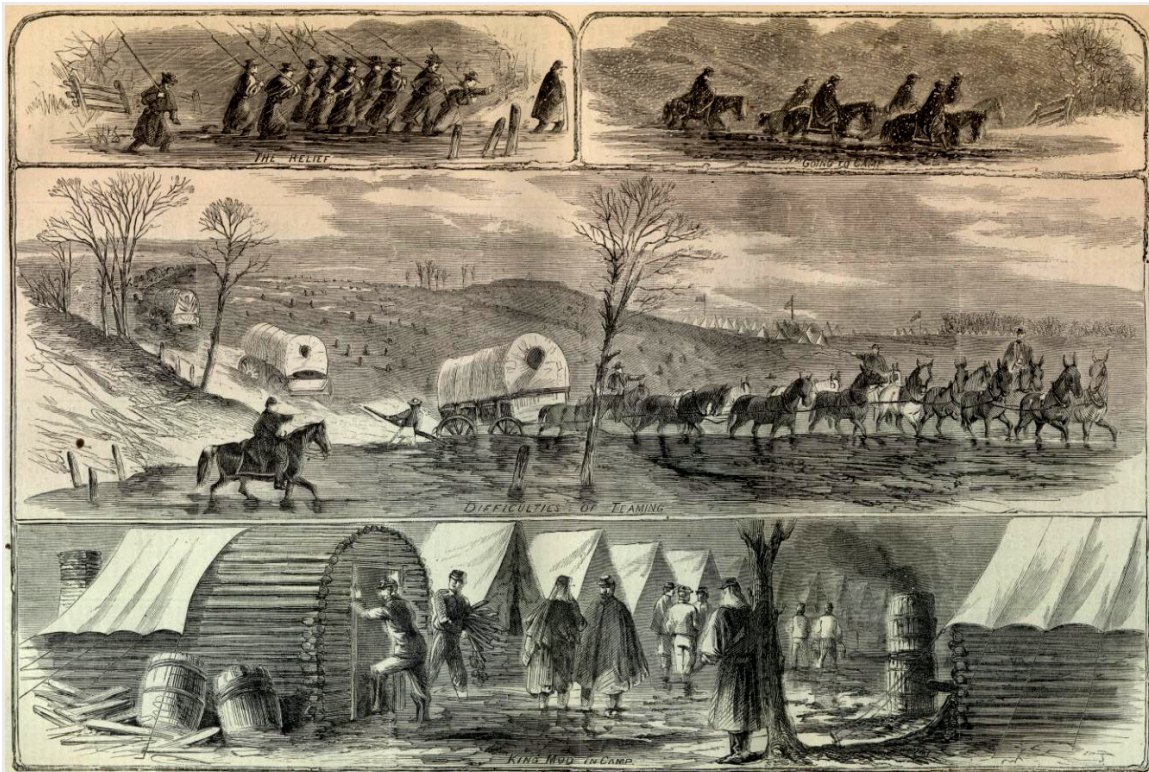

169th New York Infantry Newsletter

February 2013

The Time Traveler.

Part III.

Travel back in time to experience the Great Nor'easter of January 20-23, 1863, with the men of the 169th N.Y., as they continued to do their best to defend the nation's capital from Confederate attack.



Why the Army of the Potomac Doesn't Move
Published in "Harper's Weekly" (February 22^d, 1862)

The first month of 1863 started out in fine style in northern Virginia, not surprising for the local inhabitants perhaps, but for the men of the 169th N.Y., accustomed to the freezing winters of upstate New York, the change was a strange yet welcome respite from the cold weather of the prior month. As Sergeant Marcus Peck, Co. H, would write to his sister in Sand Lake on the 2^d, "The sun shines bright, the day is warm and mild. There is no snow on the ground, and it seems quite like summer. How odd it seems to me to not be wading in the snow after rabbits and partridges, which we generally was on New Year's Day."

But all that would soon change. Washington's mercurial winters are a natural result of the great confrontations between arctic air masses of the north and the



The Campaign in the Mud
Published in "Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War" (1894)

warm waters of the Gulf Stream to the south. The dense, cold air tries to move west over the Appalachian Mountains, but passage is refused. It remains trapped on the coastal plains and can only head south, where it meets the warm air circulating above the ocean, creating a breeding ground for storms.

That is precisely what occurred when the great Nor'easter of January 20-23 slammed into the Union troops engaged in an offensive operation along the Rappahannock River, now known to history as the "Mud March." Burnside's army bogged down in the mud while temperatures in the upper-30s added a chill to the drenched soldiers. Their wagons sank to their wheel hubs in mud and artillery pieces became hopelessly stuck. A soldier on the scene from the Army of the Potomac described the effect of the storm on the Virginia roads:

"The rain lasted thirty hours without cessation. To understand the effect, one must have lived in Virginia through a winter. The roads are nothing but dirt roads. The mud is not simply on the surface, but penetrates the ground to a great depth. It appears as though the water, after passing through a first bed of clay, soaked into some kind of earth without any consistency. As soon as the hardened crust on the surface is softened, everything is buried in a sticky paste mixed with liquid mud, in which, with my own eyes, I have seen teams of mules buried."

Sergeant Peck described the arrival of the gale at his picket outpost:

"On Monday our Company had to go out on picket. I will relate what happened while we were out. Monday afternoon we spent pitching quoits. When I say 'we,' I mean those that were on the post with me, which was Hank Ernst, Alfred Carmon, Darius Brimmer, and myself... The night passed off, and the next day also very pleasantly, but the wind blew a perfect gale and the clouds betokened a storm. About nine

o'clock at night the rain began to pour. The night was dark and the wind blew a gale. Our post had a roof made of an old house roof, and we managed to keep dry, but of course I had to keep a guard out. It was the most dreary night that we have ever spent out on picket. Morning came and also rain and at noon on Wednesday the relief came. We immediately started for camp; the rain still pouring down, and when we got home we were pretty near wet through, and like Uncle Henry we had no firewood cut. So we had to go out and cut some, and the rest of the afternoon we spent in putting things to rights and in drying our clothes."

Company D's wagonmaster, Private Robert Whitcomb, sympathized with the army in the field in a letter to his parents in Sandy Hill, as he knew his own regiment would be on the march someday: "You would laugh to come here and see us here in our tents, but we are fairing well while some of the poor soldiers are almost suffering and on the march to the battlefield. But we don't know but our turn will come next to march."

Sergeant James B. Randall, Co. F, provided a more stoic opinion about the rain in a letter to his sister:

"You ask how much snow we have down here now, and we have none at present, for it rains very hard tonight and has all day. We went out today to move the picket lines about one mile and came in about used-up on account of the rain, which makes it very unpleasant for us to stay in camp, but it is all for the [Negro], and we must stand it, as we have sworn to."

Private Alfred Carmon, Co. H, described the mire in a letter written to his sister over the course of a few days:

January 24th: "We came in yesterday. The last night that we were out there, it rained all night, and it is not got through yet. The mud is about six inches deep here. We don't have to drill to-day, on the account of the rain and mud."

January 27th: "It is snowing here like fun. It has been raining for about a week and the mud is about a foot deep. They have four horses on one wagon and they can't hardly draw the empty wagon. Harm Joshlin is driving a team. He has pretty hard times this stormy weather. We have had so much rain lately, the ground is all covered with water, and the snow melts as fast as it comes down. The slush is about six inches deep right here in the company street. It is generally pretty dry there, when it is all mud in other places. We have to go on picket about once in two weeks and stay two days. We will have to go out again in about a week more. It is very good work in fair weather, but in stormy weather it is pretty tough work, in the night especially. In the daytime, we can go in our tents and sit down out of the storm, but in the night, we have to be out untill after the grand rounds. They come around about one or two o'clock. After that, it don't make so much difference, for there is not any Rebels around here, unless it is the old farmers."

At times the cold winds of the north gained the upper hand, in contrast to the Army of the Potomac in its recent battles. Adjutant William E. Kisselburgh kept the public in Troy informed about it in a letter to the Troy *Daily Times*:

"A very severe snowstorm has just visited us. It began Tuesday night and continued all day Wednesday. The snow is about eight inches deep on the level and it covers a stratum of mud several inches deep. One has to wade in at least a foot of 'slush,' to express it delicately,



Snowy Morning – On Picket
Published in "Harper's Weekly" (January 30th, 1864)

every time he steps out of his tent door. The storm was accompanied by violent winds, and altogether was a hard experience for soldiers on the Potomac. The army before Fredericksburg, in their miserable shelter tents, must have suffered severely, if the storm was half as bad there as it was here."

The men were out of their quarters by the 24th and enjoyed their freedom while on Sunday leave the following day. Robert Whitcomb described how he spent his day of leisure:

"I have had a very good time to-day, it being Sunday, and not much to do. Me and two lieutenants went off over to Maryland and got some beer and cigars, and then went back to our camp and took our revolvers and went out in the woods, scouting for Rebels, but didn't find any, and we was glad of it."

Sergeant Peck and the skilled woodsmen of Company H took advantage of their new circumstances to track wild game in the snow:

"Our company has to go out on picket once every two weeks. We have been out once since we received our new guns. There was a light fall of snow one night while we were out, just enough to track rabbits in, and in the morning Charlie and I took our guns and went out to try them. We soon got on a little grey's track and we followed it awhile but we did not get a shot at him."

The new guns Marcus wrote about were the U.S. Model 1861 Springfield rifle-muskets that were issued to the regiment on December 28th, replacing their Vincennes rifles. The standard rifle of the war, the Model 1861 Springfield gained its name from the fact that it was originally produced at the Springfield



Private Lorenzo Stritsman, Co. H, 169th N.Y.V.



Private Leonard Brimmer, Co. H, 169th N.Y.V.

Collection of the New York State Military Museum, Saratoga Springs, New York

These soldiers from Company H were photographed while posted at Camp Abercrombie, Va. Private Lorenzo Stritsman wears the eight-buttoned shell jacket of the New York State Militia, with matching dark trousers. He is standing with a copy of the French Model 1859 "Carbine de Vincennes" made in Liège, Belgium, known as the "Belgian" or "Chasseur de Vincennes" rifle, equipped with a menacing sword bayonet. Private Leonard Brimmer is wearing new U.S. government-issued light blue trousers with his militia jacket, and is standing with his new U.S. Model 1861 Springfield, equipped with socket bayonet.

Armory in Massachusetts. Weighing 9 pounds and firing a .58 caliber round, the Springfield had an effective range of 200 to 300 yards. Trained troops were able to fire at a rate of three rounds per minute while maintaining accuracy up to 500 yards. Private Alfred Carmon, in comparing the Springfield to the .69 caliber Vincennes, wrote that "they are like pop guns beside our other ones." Sergeant Peck added, "We like our new guns well. They are about five pounds lighter than our old ones; besides, they are a better-finished and much nicer gun. We used to call our old ones the heavy artillery – they weighed 14 pounds and our new ones weigh only nine."

The cumbersome Vincennes had very shallow rifling which did little if anything to improve its effectiveness. It is described as a rifle and not a rifle-musket because it had a shorter barrel, with an overall length of 49.75 inches and barrel length of 34.25 inches (as compared to the Model 1861 Springfield's overall length of 56 inches and barrel length of 40 inches). The U.S. Ordnance Department rated the Vincennes on a par with the Springfield, but a frank report from the 148th Pennsylvania Infantry told a different story in its evaluation of the Belgian copy:

"The bore is so irregular that, whilst in some instances .69 cal. ammunition fits the bore tightly, in others it falls from the muzzle to the breech. In many instances in firing at a target of 250 yards the balls fall short, without even penetrating the ground. The workmanship in the wood and iron is extremely rough and the piece very heavy."



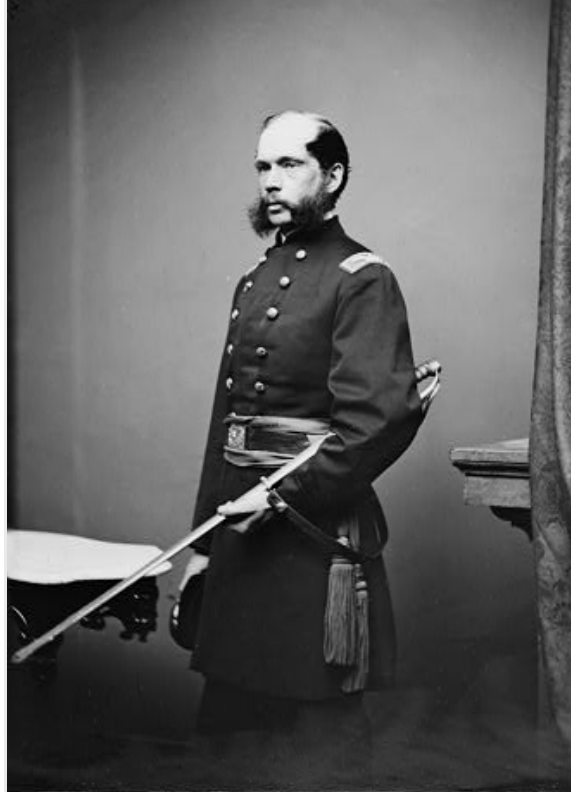
U. S. Model 1861 Springfield Rifle-Musket issued to Sergeant Hugh W. Toole, Co. D, 169th N.Y.V.
Private Collection

The 169th also had a change in their uniforms at this time, receiving light blue trousers from the Federal government, replacing their dark New York militia trousers which were quickly wearing out. Sergeant Peck was delighted: "The whole regiment have just received new pants of light blue color, and with our dark jackets and bright new guns, the Springfield rifle, which we have also just received, make quite a nice appearance on dress parade." Many years later, Brigadier-General Alonzo Alden would write in his memoirs: "Courage in the soldier depends largely upon his consciousness of having an efficient arm, even more than his confidence in his ability to use it efficiently."



"Unique and Remarkable, Historic Etched and Engraved U.S. Model 1861 Percussion .58 Caliber Union Army, Rifled Musket. Nothing quite the likes of it has ever been viewed or encountered previously. Obviously a musket brought home following his discharge, as a memento by the soldier who had carried it, and who later sent its metal parts to a custom etcher and engraver (the style of that work strongly suggests the Ames Sword Company) to have commemorative inscriptions and motifs applied to it. Workmanship and quality of those designs and lettering is of the highest professional caliber, and is unmistakably original to the post-Civil War years circa 1870s. The full length of the 40-inch barrel from its muzzle to the very tip end of the tang at the breech, bears relief-etched designs, executed in the most ornate manner, filling almost every inch of that barrel, along with large, lengthy and extremely fancy inscribed panels, all executed in the highest professional manner and fanciest of old English lettering." Listed at auction in 2008 at Gettysburg, Penn., with an estimate of \$35,000-45,000, the rifle did not sell.

<http://historical.ha.com/c/item.zx?saleNo=6002&lotIdNo=101003>



Colonel Clarence Buel, commanding the 169th N.Y.V. (ca. 1863)

Highly-regarded by the U.S. Army for his service with the Harris Light Cavalry, Captain Clarence Buel was awarded command and promotion to colonel of the 169th N.Y. at its organization in 1862. The respect accorded to him by the men under his previous command was recognized by Willard Glazier in his book, *Three Years in the Federal Cavalry* (1870):

"Colonel Clarence Buel is paying us a visit to-day. This gallant and noble officer, who organized and formerly commanded the Troy company of the Harris Light, has recently been promoted to the colonelcy of the Hundred and Sixty-ninth New York Infantry. The colonel has taken a temporary leave of absence from his new command for the purpose of making us a friendly call; and he is again surrounded by his old tried friends and comrades. Company E hails with pleasure its former loved captain, and though sad at his loss, still rejoices in his well-earned and merited promotion. All the men of the company showed their respect and admiration for him by falling into line upon the announcement of his arrival in camp, and thus greeted the Christian soldier. It was a very delightful and enjoyable occasion.

"As a soldier, Colonel Buel stands among the bravest and the best. Always attentive to the wants of his command, his men are always the last to be out of supplies of rations or clothing. He generally exercised that fatherly care over us which called forth in return a filial love. He is dignified, and yet perfectly affable. As a commander, he is intrepid and cool, and manages his troops with admirable skill. He possesses a naturally well-balanced mind, thoroughly cultivated, and a heart always full of Christian hopefulness and benevolence. We wish him great success in his new field of labor and responsibility."



**Lieutenant-Colonel John McConihe, 169th N.Y.V.,
Camp Abercrombie, Va. (November 4th, 1862)**

As senior colonel, Colonel Buel was placed in command of the 4th Provisional Brigade, Abercrombie's Division, as Acting Brigadier-General. The brigade included the 118th N.Y., 152^d N.Y., 169th N.Y., and 4th N.Y. Heavy Artillery.

Major Alonzo Alden was placed in command of the 169th while Lieutenant-Colonel McConihe recuperated in Washington and later in Troy from surgery on his left arm, a result of a wound received at Shiloh which had broken out afresh. The *Troy Daily Whig* reported on the new arrangements on January 14th:

"The One Hundred and Sixty-ninth is at present commanded by Major Alonzo Alden, a gallant soldier, and a meritorious because an efficient officer. Major Alden, like General Buel and Lieut.-Col. McConihe, has seen active service and is peculiarly fitted to command. Lieut.-Col. McConihe was severely wounded at Shiloh or the battle of Pittsburg Landing, while leading his company as captain of the Nebraska First."

Colonel McConihe described his ordeal in correspondence with family and friends over the winter of 1862-'63:

November 9th, 1862: "On Thursday last, a cold, bleak, windy day, I drilled the battalion about three hours, sitting on my black steed. I was chilled on my return to camp, and the next morning both wounds presented a red and the arm a swollen appearance. Friday night, it was in its pristine glory, and it never looked or felt worse than it does today. It suppurated like itself last night, and to all appearances the new flesh will all melt away soon. The probe evinces its usual alacrity to make known holes and rough bone; but I will not trouble you with minute description, only simply state that my wound appears more inflamed than in June last, and that I am consoled by the probabilities that the bone must be scraped and the arm again be lacerated. I go into the city tomorrow to consult with some surgeon."



Captain John McConihe, Co. G, 1st Nebraska Infantry, in Cincinnati, Ohio, with left arm in a sling after being shot at the battle of Shiloh, Tenn., April 7th, 1862

Collection of the Albany Institute of History & Art, Albany, New York

November 18th: "I came down [to Washington] about eight days ago, and am under the care of an eminent surgeon, Dr. Clymer. He has charge of all the wounded officers, and to-morrow at two o'clock, he proposes to open up the wound *à la* Dr. Potter and examine the bone. The probe strikes dead bone upon being inserted at either opening and that must be removed. I shall take ether and hope I will not scare any of the inmates of the house very badly. I think I can keep my mouth closed this time and act better than on the former occasion. I hope to improve every time I take it."

John Newton, author of a memoir about his old friend, would later write: "In the preceding extract, he makes allusion to the loud cries he made when intoxicated by the ether, which were of that nature that nearly the whole neighborhood was aroused, under the impression that foul play was being done, or that the surgeons were engaged in dissecting a man while alive."

December 19th: "Four weeks ago, on the blessed Sabbath, I was laid out on a large table, and for more than four hours I drank ether while four doctors let out my blood and dug away at that unfortunate arm. I can assure you that the operation had anything but an exhilarating effect. For three weeks I remained in bed, but the past week I move about the house, and to-day ventured into the street. To give you some

idea of the operation, I will state that the cut was a little over four inches from the wrist up, and the bone was thoroughly scraped. It was very severe, but I lived through it and remain on Earth to-day, an example of conservative surgery. My good and kind mother came on and attended me but returned home yesterday. Where the old wound was, the doctor stuffs in daily a large wad of lint to make it heal from the bone outwardly."

December 31st: "My arm is doing well and I hope to leave here by Friday for Troy. But John, my arm looks like a veteran. It is terribly scarred and somewhat shriveled. The last operation will show for itself, a long time to come, fully as long as I remain in this 'show case.' It will be some time before I rein that black and festive charger of mine with my left arm, and even then I will not be so free with it as I was in November last. The poor old fingers, as Mrs. Newton would say, peep from the bandage and rest upon a splint, pretty much as in last August. The long gash is healing fast, and the old wound is kept open by means of lint inserted daily to make it heal from the bottom. I hope there is no Rebel mean enough to shoot me again."

February 10th, 1863: "Pieces of bone are continually coming out of my arm. The doctor yesterday said both tibular and fibular [radius and ulna] were affected and shelling off. But I have hopes, and as you can see from the picture which was taken week before last, I keep up my spirits."

March 2^d: "My arm continues to improve and the wound is fast healing. Dr. Clymer says it has progressed as rapidly and as satisfactorily as he anticipated. He knew there was dead bone to come out, and did not remove it, as he was afraid of impairing the efficiency of the arm. He seems much pleased with the result."

Private Theodore Schutt, Co. A, a prolific correspondent to the *Daily Whig*, wrote about the changes in command. He also alluded to resignations by several officers in the regiment, in some cases due to health issues, while in others were the result of their not yet having mastered the intricacies of infantry warfare:

"You have no doubt learned, ere this, that a new brigade has been erected in this department, and that, temporarily at least, Col. Buel has been appointed Acting Brigadier-General, and W. E. Kisselburgh, Act. Ass. Adjt.-General, while our able and experienced Major, Alonzo Alden, is acting as Colonel, and Jerome B. Parmenter as Adjutant. A few other changes have occurred in consequence of the resignation of some of the officers of the regiment, and, as a consequence, promotions have not been infrequent of late. Notwithstanding these changes, the regiment is fast attaining a high-state of discipline and efficiency. For the past few weeks the drill has been vigorously pushed forward, and there is a marked improvement, both among officers and privates, especially in battalion movements. Whether this is any indication of an early advance to the front or not, I cannot say, but there is a general impression here that such is the fact, and that as soon as the paymaster pays us his *deniers*, we shall set our faces southward, with the order, 'Forward, march!'"

An order from Brigadier-General John J. Abercrombie explained that those officers who were incapable of conducting regimental and company drills in person were subject to examination. Sergeant Peck commented on the intrigue which followed in a letter home on January 13th:

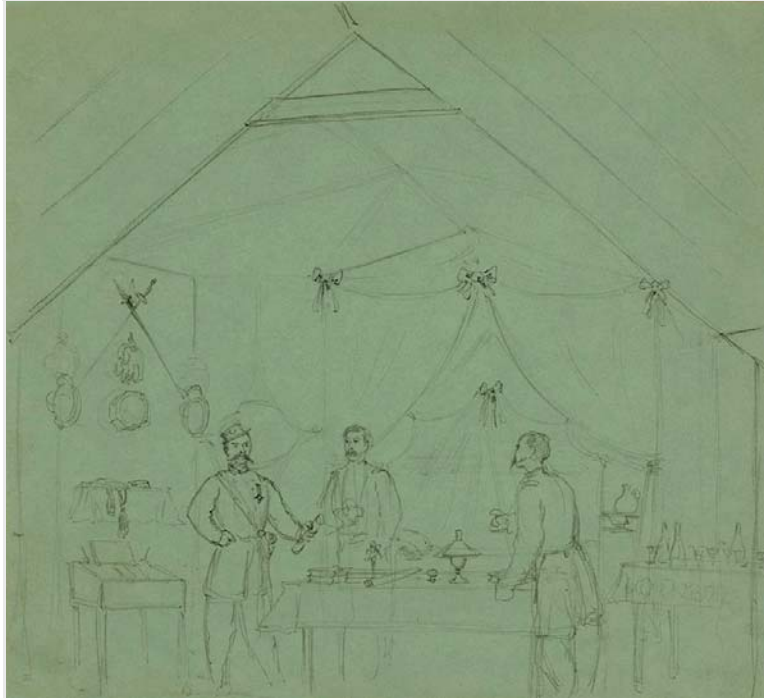


**U.S. Model 1850 Foot Officer's Sword belonging to 2^d Lieutenant Michael Holmes, Co. B, 169th N.Y.V., produced by Collins & Co., Hartford, Connecticut
Collection of Richard A. Angelico, New Orleans, Louisiana**

"Several of the officers received a card from someone, I don't know who, notifying them to appear before an examining board to see if they understood the tactics well enough to command. Our officers were among those that received the notices. The captains of Companies E and I have resigned; also three lieutenants. I think our officers came very near resigning. Captain Wickes even went so far as to ask the boys one night at roll call if any of them had anything that they wished to send home, as he expected to go home soon... The boys all thought at the time that Captain Wickes would resign, but it has passed by and I guess the officers are all right... But I must close my letter and go to studying tic-tacks and prepare myself for examination, ha ha."

2^d Lieutenant Michael Holmes, Co. B, resigned his commission rather than face the examining board. Described in the *Daily Times* as "one of the most energetic and popular officers in the 169th," the members of his company and his friends presented him with a sword, sash, belt, uniform and overcoat before leaving Troy. Lieut. Holmes had spent much of the following months rounding up stragglers in New York, and had few opportunities to conduct drills with his company. His resignation letter stated the reason for his resignation as "an unconquerable unwillingness to appear before the Examining Board appointed to test the military qualifications of Regimental Officers." The *Daily Times* wrote on January 15th: "The non-commissioned officers and private soldiers of Co. B, One Hundred and Sixty-ninth Regiment, have united in a testimonial to Lieut. M. Holmes, expressing their kind wishes for him, and their regret at his resignation."

The loss of five commissioned officers to the regiment meant that some of the NCOs would have to replace them. The sergeants were next in line to face the examining board, as related by Sergeant Peck:



Three officers talking inside a tent
Alfred Rudolph Waud (1828-1891)
Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

January 2^d, 1863: "What do you think about the changes that have taken place in the 169th, and what do you think when I tell you that my name has been handed in to the major to be examined for promotion? I think there will soon be still further changes in the 169th Reg't., N.Y.S.V. An order was read on dress parade the other night that two sergeants' names should be handed in to the major, from each company in the regiment, to be examined for promotion. The two from Company H were First Sergeant James H. Dunn and Fifth Sergeant Marcus Peck. But say nothing. I don't expect it will amount to much though."

January 24th: "Evening came, (and I was expecting to write home), but with it came an order to appear that night, before Acting Brig.-Gen. Buel, to be examined as a candidate for promotion. I'll bet you I felt a little scary, but I plucked up courage, for a soldier has got to be brave, and put on a good cheek. And when the time came, seven o'clock, I went to his quarters. There were ten sergeants examined. The first night the examination was not so bad as I thought it would be, as he asked us questions in rotation, from 7 untill 10 o'clock, three hours, and told us to come the next day at four o'clock. I missed but one question the first night. The next day I spent mostly in study. Four o'clock came and we repaired to the colonel's tent again. This time he examined us from four o'clock till seven, six hours in all. What do you think of that, Mall? Seven o'clock came and we were dismissed; then came the ten orderly sergeants' turn. How it will turn out I do not yet know, but I suppose my chance will be rather slim, as there are so many to select from. But never mind, it did me no hurt to be examined. Say nothing."



Federal soldier paraded through the streets of Washington for breaking army regulations while drummer plays "Rogue's March"
 Published in "Forward to Richmond – McClellan's Peninsular Campaign" (1983)

Desertions, a problem affecting the entire Union Army, added to the difficulties in maintaining the strength of the regiment. The reasons for deserting varied by individual soldier, but may be generalized as follows:

Place	Primary Reason	Number
Troy, N.Y.; New York, N.Y.	Bounty jumpers.	17
Staten Island, N.Y.	Failure by the Federal government to pay enlistment bonuses in a timely manner, causing financial hardships for the men and their families.	71
En Route to Virginia; Camp Abercrombie, Va.	Same as above, along with failure to pay monthly wages.	32
Washington, D.C.	Poor living conditions and sickness in the muddy field at Camp Crescent while awaiting the construction of the Martindale Barracks.	4

Total: 124

The above figures are only for the men who got away, and excludes those who returned to the regiment, either voluntarily or after being captured. Major Alden described the problem at Camp Abercrombie as "Cashless Fever," while Private Carmon would point out the potential for further disintegration of the army if the men were not paid soon:

January 11th, 1863: "The boys are all skeddaddling out of our regiment. There is two or three that goes every day. We have not had any pay yet and don't know when we will get any. The 4th U.S. Artillery says if they don't pay them off before the 15th, that they will take their guns and cartridge boxes and go home. The 118th N.Y. and 152^d N.Y. say that they will go, too. The artillery is seventeen hundred strong and the other two regiments with them will make them three thousand strong, and it would take quite an army to stop them."



The Rip Raps got its name from the rippling of the water as the Chesapeake Bay encounters a shoal off the Virginia Peninsula.

February 3^d, 1863: "But I think that I will go somewheres pretty soon if they don't pay us off before a great while. It is pretty hard times here just now. Our officers keep a telling us that we will get paid next week, but that has played-out some time ago. Some of the boys are getting tired of waiting, so they go off without it. There was four that went out of company C the other day, and they keep a-going. Charley Crandall went off about two weeks ago, but they caught him and brought him back again, and he is in the guardhouse now, and I think that it will go pretty hard with him."

In letters from Adjutant Kisselburgh, the *Daily Times* described the case of Private Halsey Nichols, Co. E, who, it was claimed, planned to incite a mutiny:

January 3^d, 1863: "A deep and well-laid scheme to incite mutiny in the regiment, or at least among those disaffected by the exactions of the service, has just been discovered through the vigilance of Major Alden, and the originator of it, private Halsey Nichols, of Co. E, has been arrested and is now in the guard-house, with a fair prospect of having to serve the government for the term of his enlistment in some other capacity than that of a soldier. Nichols placed himself in communication with a Washington sharper or claim agent, and through him expected to work miracles in the way of breaking up the regiment. He is a very sharp and dangerous man, and when confronted with the witnesses before the Major, questioned them with all the skill of a first-class lawyer."

February 3^d: "Private Halsey Nichols, of Co. E... has been tried by court martial, convicted and sentenced to one year's imprisonment in a Government fortification, at hard labor. He has already conveyed to Washington, and placed in charge of the Provost Marshal. Nicholas resided in Fort Edward, Washington county. He has been the cause of considerable trouble in the regiment – at Troy and New Dorp, as well as at this place – and has only received his just deserts in the punishment awarded him."

Private Carmon would write: "They sent one man to the 'rip-raps' the other day, for trying to break up the regiment when he went off. He told the officers that he was not through with them yet. He said that he would be back in two months if they did send him off for a year." Private Nichols would return to his regiment and he mustered out of the service with his company at the end of the war. Sergeant George M. Whitcomb, Co. D, signaled the end of the cashless fever epidemic when he informed his family that Uncle Sam paid up the men from the time they enlisted until the first of November.

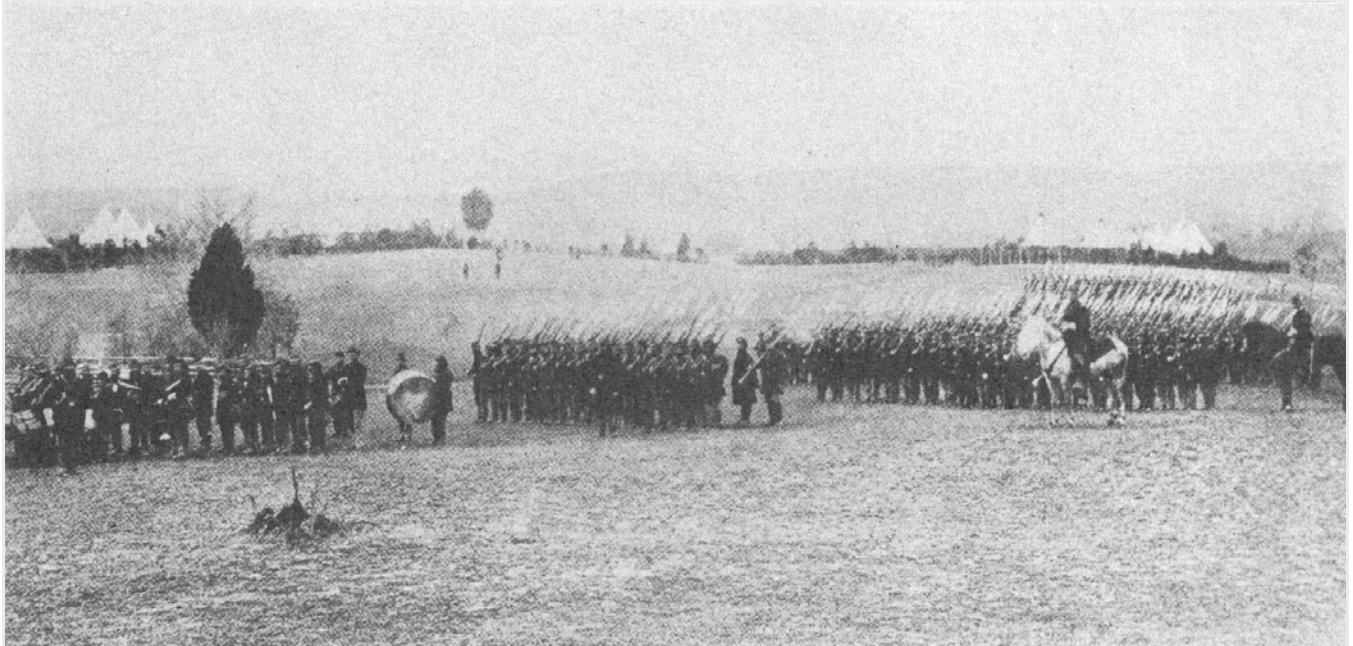


Towards the end of 1862 the officers of the 169th organized the regimental band, appointing Private James M. Smith, Co. K, as its leader. The band was made up by details from the companies, with the officers purchasing the necessary instruments. As Private Schutt wrote in a letter to the *Daily Whig*:

"There is no lack of musical talent in the regiment. The band has already been organized in the selection of its members and the assignment of instruments, so that we soon expect to have our Dress Parades and Guard Mountings enlivened by the discourse of sweet sounds and harmony, where now the 'piercing fife' and 'rattling drum,' do make discordant din."

It did not take long for the band to become proficient enough to play during dress parade, and it had its first public appearance within three weeks of its organization, as reported by the *Daily Times*:

December 30th, 1862: In a few evenings, it is expected the new brass band of the regiment will have made such progress as to enable it to appear on dress parade. The men composing it were taken from the



17th New York Infantry with regimental band on parade, Minor's Hill, Virginia (ca. 1862)

ranks, and although they have been in practice but a few days, they play with considerable proficiency. A large building, designed for band practice, and christened the 'Academy of Music,' is being put up near the camp.

January 24th, 1863: The new band of the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth made its first public appearance on dress parade last Sunday evening, and performed very nicely. Private Smith, of Co. K, (Lansingburgh), is the leader.

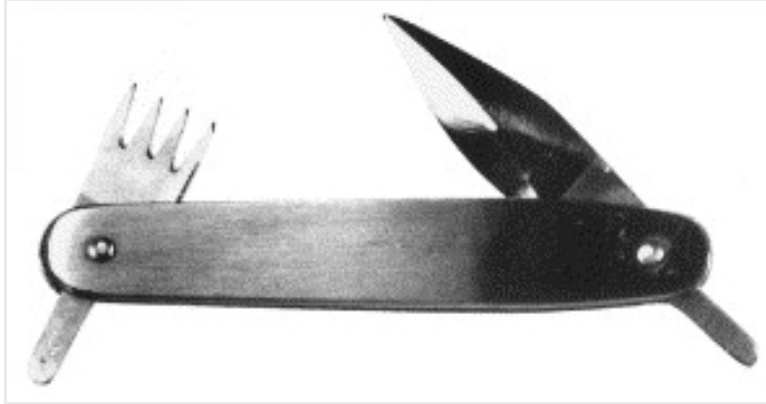
Having returned to the regiment in February, Colonel McConihe was pleased with the band's performance and saw how it might affect the regiment's postings:

"Our band plays 33 pieces, and with good execution. It is composed of 14 instruments and is a credit to the regiment. As but few regiments have bands, we stand an excellent chance of being stationed where the band is needed, in Washington, or at headquarters if in the field."

The threat of disease in winter camp always loomed in the background. Though the men of the 169th were, generally speaking, in very good health through January, the situation would change the following month. Measles were raging in the 118th N.Y., and smallpox was discovered in two regiments of the brigade. In a letter on January 29th, Sergeant Peck explained what happened next:

"To begin with, we have all been vaccinated by order of Col. Buel, as the smallpox is said to be in two of the regiments of our brigade. It was no use to refuse, for one man in Co. B did and he was put in the guard-house. I hardly think mine will work, but we cannot tell yet, as it has been only three days since the operation was performed."

Smallpox was more feared than the enemy's bullets. To build immunity against the disease, scabs were taken off the sores of a person with smallpox and sliced up into tiny bits. Each man would wait in line for a doctor to cut his arm three or four times with a knife, then put one of the tiny bits of smallpox scab in the cut. The cuts gave the men sore arms for 10 days. Like all vaccinations, there was a



Comb and lancet used by doctors to administer smallpox vaccinations

risk of acquiring a full-blown case of the disease, but if the vaccinated person was lucky, he would just be achy and feverish for a few days and afterward would be immune to smallpox. But the process often failed.

It is unknown at present how many men from the 169th contracted smallpox from the vaccination, or the number of men who suffered damage to their immune systems which would lead to a dramatic increase in fever, diarrhea, and coughs in the regiment the following month.



Private John Shaughnessy, Co. I, for example, was admitted on April 8th to Kalorama Hospital in Washington for the typical form of smallpox known as "variola discreta." He returned to duty on May 27th, but his health was ruined. Suffering from chronic diarrhea and recurring fever, he was again hospitalized from September 3^d, 1863, to May 14th, 1864. Private Shaughnessy was detached from the regiment for duty with the Ambulance Corps, Army of the James, on September 6th, 1864, and served with that organization until the end of the war.

Colonel McConihe's prognostication concerning the regimental band's influence in future assignments for the 169th proved to be correct when the regiment was transferred to the nation's capital to perform provost duty. General Alden summarized the change in his history of the 169th:

"February 12th, 1863, the brigade which Col. Buel commanded was disbanded as an organization and the 169th was ordered to Washington and reported to Gen. Martindale, military governor, for 'provost guard



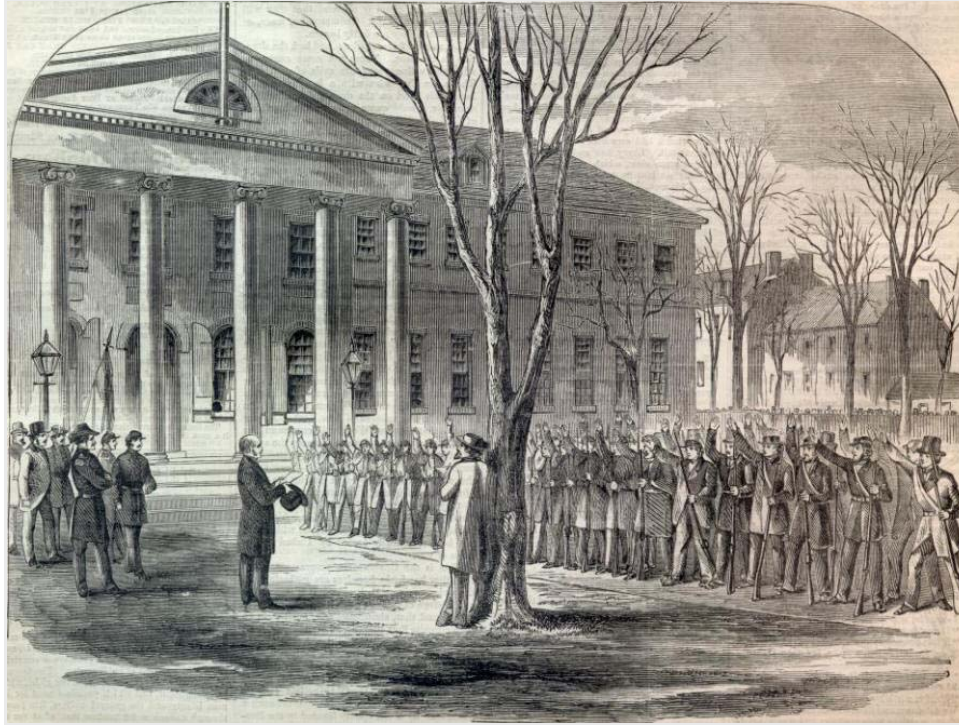
Union soldiers performing provost guard duty at the White House

duty,' and encamped for a brief period at 'Camp Crescent,' so named because it was crescent-shaped. By direction of General Martindale excellent barracks were constructed near 'The Circle,' between Washington and Georgetown, which in honor of the general were called Martindale barracks. Into this the 169th moved about March 1st, 1863. About this time Lieut.-Col. McConihe rejoined the regiment and Col. Buel was put on a military commission at the Old Capitol prison, with Capt. Jerome B. Parmenter as judge advocate. Soon after the regiment reported in Washington, Major Alden was assigned to the command of the district of Georgetown and continued his command until the regiment left the district for more perilous duties."

General Alden would write in his memoir: "This order, issuing from the Secretary of War, was esteemed a high compliment to the 169th Regiment, as the duties imposed were regarded as of the most delicate nature, because the regiment and the manner in which it discharged its duties would be most critically scrutinized by military experts of all nations who could, and most assuredly would, resort to the capital city of our American republic during our country's emergency." Adjutant Kisselburgh expressed his excitement over the change in a letter on February 10th to the *Daily Times*:

"At last the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth regiment has been ordered to move! – not, as I understand it, to 'the front,' nor to join some one of the many expeditions operating along the Southern coast, nor yet to reënforce the gallant Rosecrans in the West, but to do duty, of some sort, in the military district of Washington. The order has just reached us, and the particular character of the duty before us and our future location, are still locked up in the secret bosom of Gen. Martindale, to whom Col. Buel is to report. The brigade commanded by Col. B. is also broken up.

"A general reorganization of the army *corps* commanded by Gen. Heintzelman is now being made. The Pennsylvania reserves, veterans



**The War Department – General Thomas Swearing In the Volunteers
Called Into the Service of the United States, Washington, D.C.
Published in "Harper's Weekly" (April 27th, 1861)**

from many a hard-fought battlefield, have joined the department, and relieved Abercrombie's division, which is being concentrated at one of the city's principal points of defense. These changes are rendered necessary by the fact that the troops in the department have been detached from the army of the Potomac, and doubtless many others equally important are being made."

Getting to the capital was not easy in the mud, as related by Sergeant Peck:

"Yesterday, the 12th day of February, saw the 169th, 118th N.Y., and 152^d N.Y. floundering through the mud on their way from Camp Abercrombie to Washington. To-day finds us encamped for a few days at the junction of Washington and Georgetown. The whole regiment had to sleep on the ground last night, as we had just time enough to pitch our tents, eat our supper, spread down our blankets, and sleep till morning. I did not sleep as well as I did in my comfortable quarters at Camp Abercrombie the night before, but a soldier you know has got to do all the best he can. But this must answer for this time, as I feel rather tired and sore after lugging my heavy knapsack five or six miles through the mud. All well as usual."

The regiment's duties were described in a letter to the *Daily Times*:

"Our position is very pleasant, and we are booked probably for a long time, as the authorities dislike very much to change a regiment after it is broken into the service. We guard the War Department, Generals Halleck's, Martindale's and Heintzelman's headquarters, about \$15,000,000 of commissary stores, (Capt. Allen's company guard the stores,) and about \$4,000,000 medical stores. Major Alden with nearly two companies is stationed in Georgetown, and has charge of the prison in which deserters are confined. Besides doing this, the officers and



U.S. Treasury

Published by Edward Sachse & Company, Baltimore, Maryland (186?)
Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

men have a chance occasionally of going off with prisoners. A few days since, Lieut. Cary conveyed Chaplain Landstreet, Jackson's chaplain, to Falmouth, to be turned over to the enemy and to-night Capt. McCoun with twelve men takes down to Fortress Monroe about one hundred and fifty deserters from regiments in that vicinity."

Sergeant Randall identified the U.S. Treasury Department as his post in a letter to his father. He was responsible for guarding Uncle Sam's money.

"The other day, I was on duty at the Treasury Department, and there I saw greenbacks enough to fill two such tents as I now occupy. This you may think is a big story, but is true. I have not done guard duty but two days since we have been in the city, and for four days in succession I have been in the Congress Chamber, and there heard our big men talk and debate upon different questions before the House. It is a pleasant way of spending a man's time, I think, but of all the sights for a country boy, the sight of the Capitol is best of all. I have not been to the Navy Yard yet, but will soon. There is a good deal to see there.

"We expect to stay our three years here in this city if we have the luck that we have had. Our colonel has got the position of provost marshal of the District of Columbia, and if so, we are alright. Our colonel is a man that works for our interest in every way and will do well by us, but he is a Free Mason – this helps him, does it not?"

The men of Company H were not as fortunate as the rest of the regiment, as they were still responsible for guarding the Maryland side of Chain Bridge. Private Carmon described what he saw when he was in Washington, but did not say what he did with the whiskey:

"Our regiment has gone to Washington. They are doing guard duty there. There was a squad of us sent up to the Chain Bridge to guard that. I saw 'old Abe' the other day when I was in Washington. I saw



Washington Circle, with Camp Fry to the south

Camp Crescent occupied the southern half of the area surrounding the equestrian statue of George Washington.

several of the big generals, too. They are the most common-looking men.

"We have considerable fun here! We have to search everybody that crosses the bridge and every wagon. I saw a sleigh go down towards Washington this morning. It is the first one that I have seen this winter. It looked kindy funny. We get lots of whiskey every day. They are not allowed to carry it across the bridge, so we have to take it from them.

"Our regiment is a going to have dress coats when we are in the city. We have to look as nice as you please. Boots blacked, clothes brushed, and we have to keep our guns so clean that some of the men use them for looking glasses when they go to shave."

Traveling back and forth to Chain Bridge took a heavy toll on Sergeant Peck's health, possibly made worse by the effects of the smallpox vaccination the previous week. Sleeping in the mud of Camp Crescent did not help matters, either:

"Our regiment's duty is provost guard in Washington, but we also have to guard this end of Chain Bridge also, which is nearly five miles from our camp. The first duty which I did after we moved was to go back to Chain Bridge with Lieut. Lyon and a squad of men to guard the bridge. We were to stay one week before we would be relieved. We marched quite fast and when we got there I went on guard. It is a cold, windy place and I took cold and fever set in. Of course I had to return to camp. Lieut. Lyon was very kind to me; he offered to send for an ambulance to take me into camp, but I got into the little horse boat which runs on the canal from Chain Bridge to Georgetown, and thus I got into camp quite comfortable. I went immediately to the doctor's and got some medicine – the first I have had to take since I left home. It was bitter, miserable stuff and I made up my mind I would not take all the doctor ordered, nor I didn't. Amblinger had some catnip and Dick made me some catnip tea and it seemed to help me. But I am now nearly well again and shall soon be about again.



Abraham Lincoln at the White House
Henry Alexander Ogden (1856-1936)

"My being sick has deprived me of seeing the sights about Washington. Dick has already shaken hands with Old Abe, passed through the White House, been in the Senate and House of Representatives, and I know not where. Old Strausburgh has got his discharge but you will probably see him before this letter reaches home. He cried when he left and he gave the captain five dollars as a present. We have not yet moved into the barracks; the sooner we do, the better it will be for the regiment, for we are encamped in a sea of snow and mud."

Sergeant Randall concurred with Sergeant Peck regarding the deplorable conditions at Camp Crescent, and provided further evidence of the failing health of the regiment:

"My health is good at present but I am not quite as fleshy now as I was, but in good condition yet. We have a pretty hard time here now, for the reason that we have not moved into the barracks yet. Consequently, we have many cases of the fever caused by exposure. We have ten sick men in our company. 211 have got the fever, and some very sick. One of our men, a likely young man, was taken sick the day after we moved, and the next morning he was taken to the hospital and died there this same day. He was a boy that could be depended upon in any places. I cannot but think of the expressions he made, as I with the assistance of another sergeant were helping him into the ambulance. He requested us to once more let him walk on Maryland's soil, for it would be the last time.



Map of George Washington Circle, Washington, D.C.

"We have had some very cold weather here. You have seen an account of it, perhaps, in the papers. Good sleighing here, but it will all go off today. We have a heavy rain here today. It commenced at about 3 o'clock this morning. The snow is about all gone out now. What an awful place – we have got to stay in all the mud and rain, but we go into the barracks tomorrow."

The Martindale Barracks were located at the intersection of Pennsylvania Avenue, New Hampshire Avenue, and 23^d Street. Sergeant Peck and Colonel McConihe provided a visual picture of the layout:

Sergeant Peck: "Tomorrow we're to move into the barracks. Those who have seen them say they are splendid quarters. Each company is separate by themselves, and there is a sleeping room, an eating room and a cook room, each separate by themselves. Stoves are furnished to cook with and large coffee pots and kettles, so I think our provisions will be more cleanly cooked than they have been. Some say that each man is to be furnished with a mattress. I don't know how true it is."

Lieutenant-Colonel McConihe: "We are in camp, just to the right of the Washington Statue, and to-morrow we move into our new quarters on Pennsylvania avenue, between 23^d and 24th streets. The barracks are very roomy and comfortable, containing good kitchens, stores, hydrants, bunks, and gas, all being new and clean. As soon as we move in, the quartermaster will issue frock coats to the men, so that with our bright rifles, we shall present a fine appearance. From all quarters we receive commendations upon the soldierly conduct and bearing of the 169th. We guard at General Heintzelman's and Halleck's headquarters, at the War Department, around the White House, at Chain Bridge, Aqueduct bridge, "G" street wharf, and many minor points. The men take pride in doing their duty and in looking clean and neat."



Work on the graves register shall resume at once now that a special research project has been completed. For your review are photographs of gravestones at Arlington National Cemetery and the Soldiers' Home National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. ...



Private James Flynn, Co. G
Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Va.



Private George Greene, Co. F
Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Va.



Private Gideon Mosher, Co. C
Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Va.



Private Peter Roberts, Co. A
Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Va.
The engraved initials are apparently in error.



Private John Snow, Co. C
Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Va.



Private John Tavis, Co. I
Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Va.



Private William H. Tyrrell, Co. C
Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Va.



Sergeant William D. West, Co. E
Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Va.



Private David Crandell, Co. C
Soldiers' Home National Cemetery,
Washington, D.C.



Private John (Zabin) Mills, Co. E
Soldiers' Home National Cemetery,
Washington, D.C.

I am saddened to report the passing on December 4th, 2012, of Lewis Hallenbeck of Albany, N.Y., at the age of 93. Lewis and his wife Coreen, a volunteer at the Albany Institute of History & Art, discovered much of the material you will find in these newsletters, (along with Margot McBath Dudewicz, great-great-granddaughter of Private Samuel McBath, Co. F), through painstaking research of microfilmed archives and other sources.

Lew, a graduate of Union College in Schenectady, the alma mater of Colonel Clarence Buel and Brevet Brigadier-General and Colonel John McConihe of the 169th N.Y., was a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Navy during the Second World War, serving with the storied Naval Construction Battalion (Sea Bees), the 18th Special. He worked for the Army Corps of Engineers and as a chief engineer with the New York State Department of Transportation, and was instrumental in the development of the Interstate Highway System in western New York as Director of Region 6.

Best regards,

- Steve Wiezbicki

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