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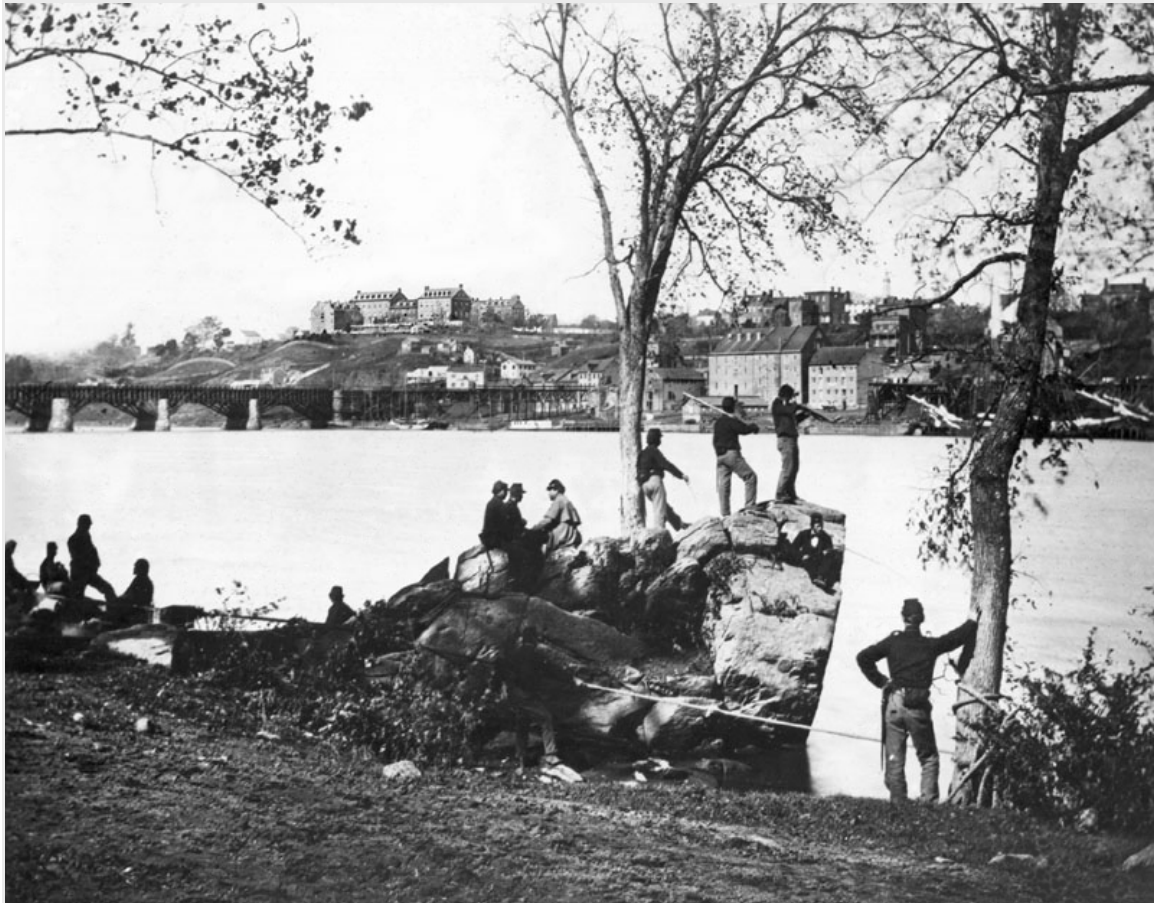
# 169<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry Newsletter

April 2013

## The Time Traveler.

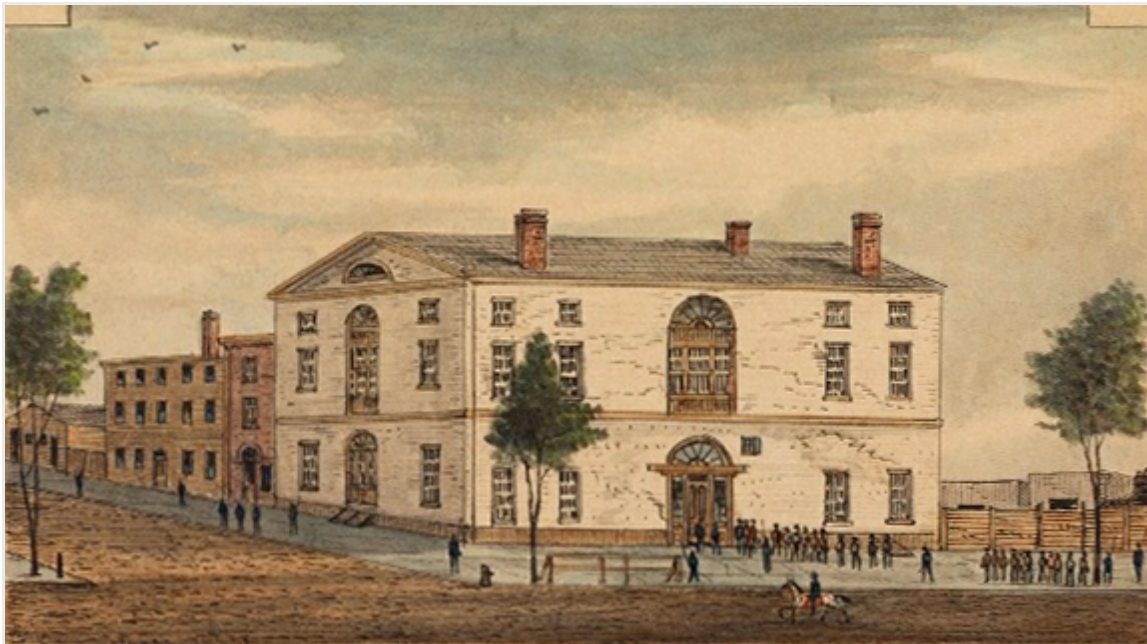
Part IV.

The 169<sup>th</sup> N.Y. would see a transition in the spring of 1863 from its provost guard duties in Washington, D.C., to manning the front lines in the South. Join the men of the regiment as they smell powder for the first time while facing down Confederate Lieutenant-General James Longstreet's Army Corps at Suffolk, Va.



Union soldiers on Mason's Island on the Potomac looking towards Georgetown (ca. 1863)

While the officers and men of the 169<sup>th</sup> N.Y. tended to their responsibilities of guarding the nation's capital and receiving compliments from all concerned for their professional conduct, the field officers of the regiment were assigned special positions in the military administration of the city. Col. Clarence Buel was appointed president of the Military Commission at the Old Capitol Prison, where



**The Old Capitol Prison, Washington, D.C., built A.D. 1817 (April, 1863)**  
**From the Journal of Private Robert Knox Sneden, 40<sup>th</sup> N.Y.V., Topographical Engineer of**  
**the III Army Corps, Vol. I, 1861 April 12 - 1862 May 5**  
**Collection of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia**

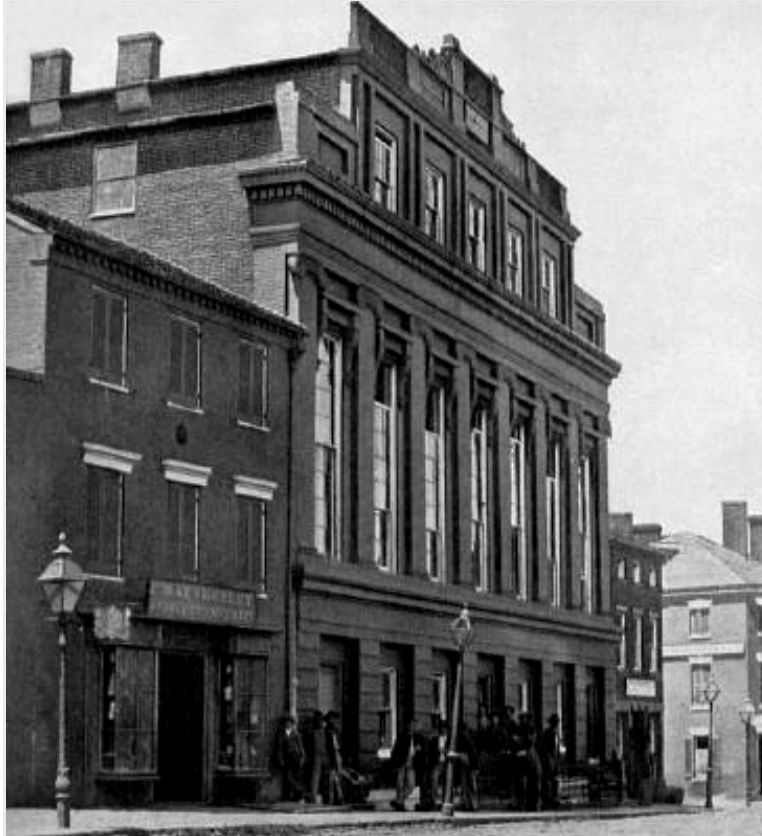
he led a military tribunal which tried those accused of unlawful conduct associated with the war.

Lieut.-Col. John McConihe assumed command of the regiment in Col. Buel's absence. The Troy newspapers reported that both officers were assigned to an examining board in Washington which was "charged with the duty of examining and reporting upon the capacity and ability to command, knowledge and tactics, general military deportment, and efficiency of such officers as may be cited before it by the proper authority."

Maj. Alonzo Alden was assigned command of the District of Georgetown, including Aqueduct Bridge and Chain Bridge. His headquarters were at Forest Hall Prison, situated on High Street, and according to his memoir, "received prisoners from all military depots in the United States, classified and dispatched them to their regiments or to the headquarters division provost marshals for distribution, with a brief history of each individual case, charges, stoppages, etc." The major also received "such prisoners as were arrested by the local guards, in the city and on the bridges, including deserters, smugglers and overt disloyalists, to detain in the prison, report to the military governor, and dispose of by his orders. Of these last named there were legion."

Col. McConihe explained his duties in a letter on March 13<sup>th</sup> to his brother Isaac, in command of the 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment N.Y.S.N.G. in Troy:

"The regiment is behaving splendidly, and the barracks, with their comforts and conveniences, are much liked by the men and officers. We all do double duty and are constantly kept busy, but as we are deprived of nothing; it is much more agreeable than roughing it in the field. Colonel Buel is detached temporarily and is trying the Capitol prisoners. He is well-liked by all who come in contact with him. Major Alden has charge of the Georgetown Prison and is not with the regiment at all. Consequently, I am in command and likely to be so while we remain here. Other duty is also assigned me, and on Monday



**Forest Hall Military Prison, Georgetown, Washington, D.C.**

next I am to sit upon the Examining Board, which may keep me well-employed for some weeks. I shall nevertheless retain the command of the regiment while upon said board."

The cushy yet responsible post in Washington wasn't without its dangers, however. One of Maj. Alden's prisoners nearly killed Corp. John E. Gorman, Co. B, while attempting to escape. He would eventually succumb from the effects of his injuries 20 years later, as reported in the *Troy Daily Times* on June 14, 1883:

#### **A Brave Soldier's Death.**

"Gen. Alonzo Alden received to-day information of the death at Washington of John E. Gorman. Mr. Gorman, some of whose relatives live in this city, resided in Troy when the one hundred and sixty-ninth regiment was organized. He enlisted in that regiment. Mr. Gorman was Gen. Alden's clerk at Forest hall prison, Georgetown, D. C., while the general was in command of the district of Georgetown in 1863. Word was received in the office that a prisoner had escaped from the third floor of the prison by jumping from a window. Gorman, bare-headed and in his shirtsleeves, pursued the escaping prisoner down the alley, caught him and, although the prisoner was of twice Gorman's weight and strength, held him by the legs. The captive pounded and kicked Gorman until he had almost killed him, but nevertheless the latter held on until assistance arrived. Gorman was badly injured internally, and Gen. Alden secured for him a position in the adjutant-general's office in Washington, where he remained until his death, May 31. Gorman was highly respected. He was a skillful penman, and had invented a number of useful articles, among them a paper filing case for protection of



**View of Georgetown, Washington, D.C. (1855)**  
**Published by Edward Sachse & Co., Baltimore, Md.**  
**Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.**

documents against loss by fire and water, now largely used in the departments at Washington. Mr. Gorman had many friends in this city, who will deeply mourn his death, which was the result of the injuries received during his heroic capture of the escaping prisoner."

Corp. Gorman wasn't the only soldier from the 169<sup>th</sup> involved in a violent altercation on the streets of Washington. The *Daily Times* reported on February 24<sup>th</sup> that "two members of Capt. N. C. Wood's company, Hugh Donnelly and James Dunn, had a difficulty in the street with the guard. They made a forcible resistance to the endeavors of the patrol to arrest them, and a serious encounter ensued, during which Donnelly was struck by a bayonet, and so seriously injured that he died in a short time." The article included interesting information about Private Donnelly's background:

"Donnelly was a moulder, and of a very pugnacious temperament. During an affray at the Washington Foundry, a few years ago, he was struck by a 'rammer,' upon his head, and received injuries that were at first believed to be fatal. Indeed, no one of ordinary strength could have survived the terrible wound inflicted upon him by the heavy iron weapon. The operation of 'trepanning' was performed, and the thickness of the skull – a portion of which was removed – attracted the attention of surgeons. He survived the affray and the operation, and joined the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth regiment last summer – passing for a peaceable and well-disposed soldier, until the difficulty which resulted in his death."

A week later, the *Troy Daily Whig* would report the miraculous resurrection of Priv. Donnelly: "We learn upon authority from Washington, and give the fact in

correction of a wrong statement appearing in the *Times* of the 24<sup>th</sup> ult., that private Hugh Donnelly, of the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth Regiment New York Volunteers, who was recently dangerously stabbed in the heart while resisting the guard who were conveying him to the Old Capitol Prison in Washington, is not dead, as stated, but is well-nigh recovered. Donnelly owes his life to the assiduous and skillful attentions of Surgeon C. M. Ford, of this city, and who is now attached to the Old Capitol Hospital as Surgeon-in-charge."



Fort Jefferson on Garden Key, Dry Tortugas, located 68 miles west of Key West in the Gulf of Mexico

The *Daily Whig* revealed the harsh punishment meted out to the men in their courts martial: "Dunn was sentenced to hard labor at the Dry Tortugas, and to be deprived of all pay, for the term of his enlistment. Donnelly was remanded to the District Jail, to be confined at hard labor for the term of three months... Both of the prisoners are well-known in the upper part of the city, where, we believe, they have families residing. Dunn, (familiarily known as 'Doctor,') is represented as being a quiet, peaceable man, except, when under the influence of liquor. His friends here are circulating a petition to the President for his pardon, which is being extensively signed." Priv. Donnelly would be discharged from the regiment on July 30, 1864, while 3<sup>d</sup> Sergt. Dunn was reduced to the ranks and would muster-out with his company at the end of the war.

On March 27<sup>th</sup>, the *Daily Whig* announced the passing of Sergt. Marcus Peck, Co. H. Marcus never recovered from the illness which took hold of him the previous month at Camp Crescent. His cousin, Corp. Richard J. Horton, Co. H, wrote a letter on the 14<sup>th</sup> on Marcus's behalf to his parents from Armory Square Hospital in Washington, an extract of which follows:

"I have not recovered yet from my sickness, nor can I say that I am very sick because I am around all the time. I am a going to the Armory Hospital to get well as there is so much noise in the company quarters that it is enough to make a well man crazy, and our doctors are not anything to brag of. Anyone is a great deal better off in the hospital than to remain in the regiment, where they have good care and good clean quarters."



Armory Square Hospital – Where Lincoln Walked Among the Flowers (August, 1865)

*"Perhaps it was because of President Lincoln's habit of visiting the Armory Square Hospital in Washington that so much care has been bestowed upon the flowers. The walks are straight and even, and the scene, except for the ambulance standing near the curved walk, seems one of peace and not of war. The Capitol rises majestic in the background, and to the left is the little chapel attached to the hospital. Earnest people entered there to send up a prayer for the soldiers who were wounded in the cause of their country."*  
– "The Photographic History of the Civil War," by Francis T. Miller and Robert S. Lanier, 1911.

Richard conveyed the sad news to Marcus's parents in Sand Lake on the 19<sup>th</sup>:

"It is with the deepest regret that I now seat myself to communicate to write to you the bad tidings, which without doubt has reached you ere this, but my wish is to relate to you the cause of his sickness and the care that was bestowed on him.

"After we reached Camp Crescent, Marcus was detailed to Chain Bridge as Sergeant of the detail. Walking up there, he said he got very warm, and being on guard took cold and within two days came back to camp sick. The Sergeant attended him but would not permit him to go to the hospital, it being a very damp time and the tent pitched on the ground with nothing but the wet ground to lie on. Captain took him in the tent with him, where he and myself did all we could for Marcus and he got nearly well, at least he said so.

"From Camp Crescent we moved in the barracks and then I thought Marcus would certainly get along. The barracks being not completed, the band was compelled to go in with our company. The noise of the band and the boys together was very annoying and Marcus seemed to get worse again. Captain then applied to Doctor Runnels to have Mar-



**Hospital ward at Armory Square Hospital, Washington, D.C.**

cus sent to the hospital. He after three or four days consented, the reason only that the band was too much for him to bear.

"The day Marcus went to the hospital I wrote home for him, stating what he requested me and he said then he thought he would be well again. I fear he did not realize that he was very ill and even not so sick as he really was. As soon as I was allowed me a pass, I went to visit him, hoping to find him gaining, but Oh dear, it was the reverse. Captain called the same day. We asked him how he felt and he said he was better and thought he would recover, as he was receiving the best of care while in the hospital. Captain asked him if he should telegraph to you and he requested to not as he still felt confident he would recover. We also gave him some oranges which he relished much at that time, although his attendants said he was delirious most of the time.

"This morning Captain again called to see him. He again conversed with him, saying that he thought he would recover. Captain called the Head Surgeon and had an examination. They said they could not do anything more for him. I again visited him today and remained with him until his death, which took place at four o'clock P.M. He died very easy. It seemed to me as I stood by his dying bed that I could not part with him; that he was too good to part with. He seemed so near to me as a brother and it seems as though my heart would break while thinking that I have to part with one that has always been near to me by the ties of friendship. He uttered not a murmur. He died with congestion of the lungs, although he had the typhoid fever, too. His loss is deeply felt among the boys. It is hard to part with him, but thus is the will of God."

It was during this time that Priv. William H. Merriam, Co. I, began his work on the illustrated manuscript entitled, "Experiences in the United States Volunteer Service in the War of 1861," as reported in the *Troy Daily Press* later in the year. The article went on to say that the work "will be made up chiefly of personal, biographical and anecdotal matters, for the faithful and entertaining presentation

of which the author has peculiar qualifications. A feature of Lieut. Merriam's work will be sketches of military personages whom he met in Washington during the past winter, from the President, as commander-in-chief, all the way along down, including major- and brigadier-generals, colonels and officers of every grade. A majority of the 'Experiences' have been of the most humorous character, and will be faithfully depicted." The whereabouts or fate of Merriam's manuscript are unknown.



**Port of Chantaboun, Siam**  
Published in "Travels in the Central Parts of Indo-China (Siam), Cambodia,  
and Laos, during the Years 1858, 1859, and 1860," by Mouhot (1864)

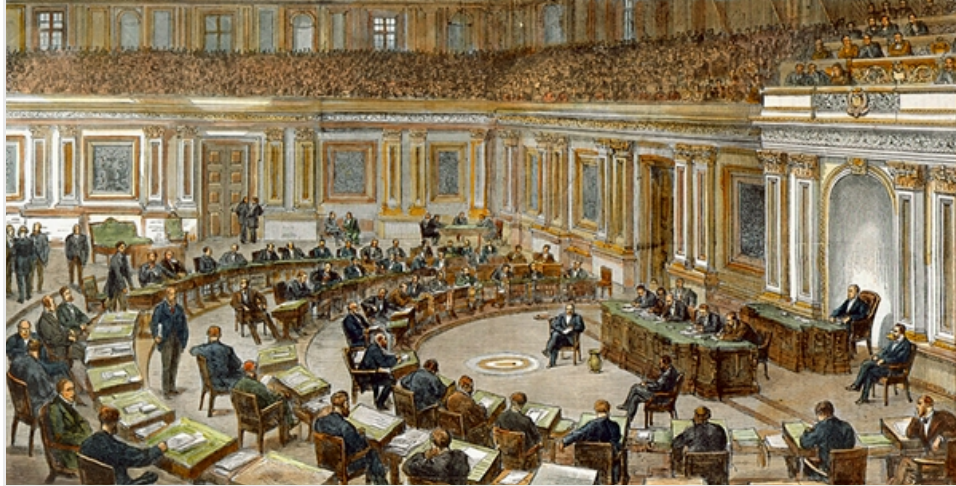
William Henry Merriam, a graduate of Union College, class of 1852, was appointed Minister to Siam by the U.S. government in 1859 and was a correspondent for the *Troy Daily Budget* and the *New York Herald* before the war. His intellect, charm, and witty sense of humor served him well in the newspaper business and made him welcome company within the power structures of the nation's capital, as reported by the *Daily Times* on the 30<sup>th</sup>:

"[Colonel Buel's] private secretary, so modestly alluded to, is none other than our genial townsman, Wm. H. Merriam. Persons who have visited the National Capital during the present winter, say that he is one of the 'institutions' of the town, and is as well-known in Washington as he ever was in Troy. Provost guards respect his sacred person – Cabinet officers salute him – even the President has been known to give him a nod of recognition. Major-Generals and private Merriam are the only soldiers of whom a 'pass' is not demanded by the remorseless patrol. Our friend owes his popularity to his social accomplishments and never-failing flow of spirits."

The spring of 1863 would find the officers and men of the 169<sup>th</sup> enjoying their last days in Washington before being sent to the field. Col. James A. Colvin would later write about the second change in uniforms in his 1880 historical sketch of the regiment:



"While in Washington, some important changes were being made in the appearance of the regiment, the uniform being made to conform to that of the regular army. In this uniform, with glittering shoulder-scales and white gloves, the men bore themselves proudly, and paid great attention to their duty."



U.S. Senate in session

Col. McConihe, the most popular of the commanders of the 169<sup>th</sup>, was known by the men as "Colonel John." He was responsible for one of the more memorable incidents in the regiment's history, when he marched the men to the U.S. Senate Chamber on March 31<sup>st</sup>, as reported in the *Daily Whig*:

"The One Hundred and Sixty-ninth Regiment attended the great mass meeting held in Washington on Tuesday evening last, in a body. – Speaking of the gathering, the *Star* says: 'The One Hundred and Sixty-ninth New York Regiment, under command of Lieut.-Col. John McConihe, accompanied by their full band, led by Prof. Smith, marched into the Senate Chamber, but were unable to obtain seats or even standing places in a body. Over the Vice President's chair was a splendid flag, on each side of which the colors, both National and State, of the 169<sup>th</sup> New York were placed.' The 'boys' are having a 'fine time,' evidently, in the capital city."

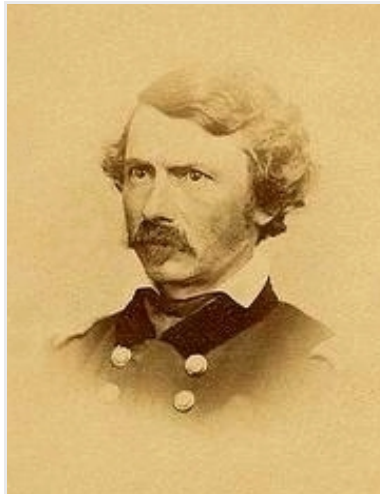
Priv. Robert Whitcomb, wagonmaster of Co. D, wrote about those last, peaceful days of the regiment in a letter home on the 7<sup>th</sup>: "Father, I have good times here; nothing to do, only ride around the city on my horse and have a man to take care of him for me and put the saddle on and fetch him up to my office door. John Haywood is my hostler and I have got a good pony."

That would all change on April 12<sup>th</sup>, however, as reported by the *Daily Times*:

"ORDERED TO THE FRONT. – At 4 o'clock yesterday morning the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth Regiment received orders to go to the front and reënforce Gen. Hooker. It was to leave Washington to-day. The regiment departs from the capital with a fine reputation for cleanliness, good order and military discipline. General Martindale pronounced it an ornament to the city. In the post of honor and danger, the regiment will have an opportunity to sustain its reputation and do credit to Troy. We expect to hear that private Merriam has taken Richmond."

1<sup>st</sup> Lieut. and Adj. William E. Kisselburgh's letter to the *Daily Times* vividly describes the occasion upon which the orders to move were received:

"The One Hundred and Sixty-ninth has at last been ordered to 'take the field,' and every energy is being strained by the officers and men composing the same to enable it to 'take' it. It is to be hoped some great good to the cause will result from an order so sudden and unexpected, and that besides 'taking the field' we may also be the humble instruments of 'taking' a few rebel prisoners and of doing sundry other things too numerous to mention. On Sunday morning at 4 o'clock, an orderly came to our headquarters, and no sooner did I hear the jangling of his sword-scabbard upon the pavement, and his loud rap upon my 'chamber door,' than I knew something was up, and promiscuously tumbled out of bed to learn the cause of this untimely visit. Oh, these night orderlies always bring news to move; and this night visitation, taken in connection with the fact that Paymaster Burt paid the regiment off on Saturday, was to my mind 'confirmation strong as proof of holy writ' that fond hopes of a long sojourn in our present agreeable quarters were doomed to a 'blarsted' blasting. A night orderly and the paymaster sent us from Camp Abercrombie; ditto Washington.



**Brevet Major-General John H. Martindale,  
Military Governor of Washington, D.C.**

"The One Hundred and Sixty-ninth has left, or will leave, an excellent reputation behind it in Washington. The men have behaved with great propriety, and have discharged their duties in a manner to call for signal commendation. General Martindale, the Military Governor, expresses his deep regrets at its departure, and has been pleased to say that 'it was an ornament to the city.' The Provost Marshal, Captain Todd, is loud in his praises of it, and expresses great dissatisfaction at the changes the removal of these regiments will create in his department... The dress parades of the regiment have been quite prominent features, and have been witnessed by large concourses of spectators. Gen. Martindale – who as a commander we all greatly regret to leave – visited the parades twice, and complimented them highly. The One Hundred and Sixty-ninth certainly has no occasion to feel any other emotion than that of pride over the record it leaves behind; and when it is considered that so many opportunities and inducements are afforded soldiers in this city to overstep the proprieties of life and the discipline of the services, the friends of the regiment may feel a renewed assurance that in whatever position it may be placed it will always do its duty. The blandishment of this modern Sodom have not been sufficient to tempt it from the path of honor; may we not hope that in more dangerous fields the presence

of a valiant foe will not frighten or subdue it? Since our stay in Washington, many of the officers and men have, through the kindness of Gen. Martindale, been permitted to visit their homes and mingle once more with those whom they hold dear."



**Sunday Review at Bayley Cross Roads (1861)**  
**François-Ferdinand-Philippe-Louis-Marie d'Orléans, Prince de Joinville**  
**Collection of Fondation Saint-Louis, Ambroise, Paris, France**

The Washington *Republican* provided further details about the return of Col. Buel to regimental command, as copied by the *Daily Times*:

"We had the pleasure of witnessing the dress parade of the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth Regiment New York Volunteers, at Martindale barracks, last evening. The troops of this command, who have lately been doing guard duty at the President's, the War Department, General Halleck's headquarters, Gen. Heintzelman's headquarters, General Martindale's headquarters, Major Alden's headquarters, at Forrest Hall, Georgetown, as well as over the various Government stores in and about this city, were all called in under a special order emanating from the General commanding, whose purport it would not be wise to disclose. A large crowd of people were in attendance to witness the interesting spectacle. The regiment looked splendidly, the arms being brightly burnished, the attire of the men faultless, in a military aspect, and the entire *tout ensemble* exceedingly striking.

"After the manual-of-arms had been gone through with, and the orders had been read by Adjutant Kisselburgh, Lieut.-Col. John McConihe announced, in a brief and complimentary speech to the command, that Colonel Buel, who had been upon detached service as President of the Military Commission at the old Capital Prison, had been relieved from that duty, and would reassume command of the regiment. Colonel McConihe complimented the soldiers upon their efficiency and good conduct since they were stationed in this city, and referred evidently with pleasure to the commendation bestowed upon the regiment and its conduct while here.

"Col. Buel, in again taking command of his regiment, complimented in high terms the appearance of the soldiers, expressed his personal

pride in their efficiency and his earnest hope that as the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth was about to take the field, its members would do no act to compromise the just and high reputation they had earned for themselves with the authorities of the Federal Capital.

"The soldiers were delighted with the addresses, as well as inspired by their patriotic eloquence and tone. It is hourly expected that the regiment will leave for the field, but whether to join Hooker's army, or to reënforce Gen. Foster, in North Carolina, is not, at this writing, definitely known."



**Fatigue Marching Order**  
Collection of the U.S. Army Quartermaster Museum, Fort Lee, Virginia

Priv. Alfred Carmon, Co. H, in a letter sent to his family prior to departing for the front, revealed the strength of the regiment at the time of its departure:

"The generals here in Washington don't want us to go. Last night, they sent guards down to the provost marshal's to relieve our guard, and he sent them back again. They say that our regiment is the best one they have ever had in the city. Our regiment has done the duty that twelve hundred men has done before. We han't got more than six hundred men in our regiment."

Although the newspapers reported that the 169<sup>th</sup> was to join either Gen. Hooker, commanding the Army of the Potomac in Falmouth, Va., or Gen. Foster, who would soon leave for Suffolk, Va., none of the field officers of the regiment knew where they would be sent, as disclosed by Col. McConihe in a brief note sent on the 14<sup>th</sup> to his business partner and classmate from Union College, John Kellogg: "The regiment is under marching orders and will probably go somewhere to-morrow; destination unknown. We are not far off yet and are awaiting orders. All our guards are not sent in, but we are ready with rations cooked and ammunition distributed."

Most, but not all of the men were looking forward to the change in venue. In a letter to his father, Col. McConihe told of a regrettable incident that occurred in the regiment's final hours in Washington:

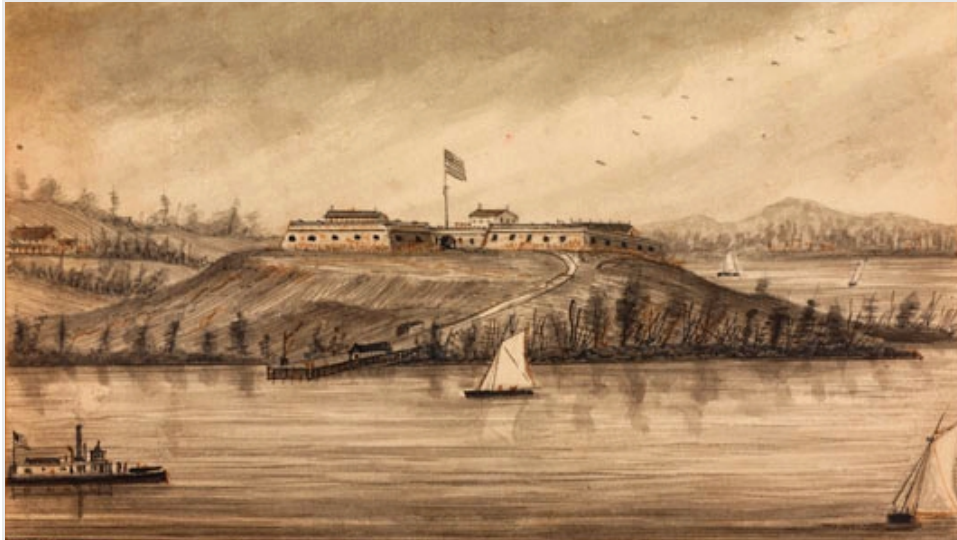


"A private in Co. G, a fine, stalwart man and previously a good soldier, cut off the forefinger of his right hand with a hatchet the moment we were about to leave the barracks at Washington, thinking this cowardly act would disable him. I ordered him brought along, and saw him go aboard the steamer, but before we started, he left the boat and is now in hospital at Washington. Such cowardly acts are frequently resorted to, to save their worthless bodies. How a man can be so base or work his timidity up to such a beastly pitch, I cannot understand. I am ashamed to own that any Irishman, one of that proverbially brave race, can be so cowardly."

The *Daily Times* informed its readers on the 18<sup>th</sup> that the 169<sup>th</sup> would probably be joining the "exciting operations impending on the Blackwater."

"In a letter received yesterday, from one of the principal officers of the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth Regiment, it was stated that its destination was Norfolk. Quite probably by this time the men are on their way to this part of Virginia. From Norfolk they will undoubtedly go to Suffolk, and take a hand in the important and exciting operations that now seem to be impending on the Blackwater. The regiment will undoubtedly attain its long-expected wish for active service, and will do credit, we are confident, to its numerous friends and its native city."

Major William M. Swartwout recalled in his memoir that the regiment "arrived at Norfolk on the 16<sup>th</sup> on the steamboat *John Warner*, thence it was carried by cars to Suffolk the following day." Col. McConihe informed his friends in Cincinnati of the regiment's safe arrival in a letter on the 19<sup>th</sup>:



**View of Fort Washington, opposite Mt. Vernon, Potomac River, Virginia (March 22, 1862)**  
"Journal of Robert Knox Sneden, Vol. 1"  
Collection of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia

"Our 'show military' is passed. We are now in the midst of active service, and are hemmed in by savage enemies. We left Washington the 15<sup>th</sup> and sailed down the Potomac, passing all points on that historical stream, and viewing them with much interest.



**View of Mount Vernon, Potomac River, Virginia (December 23, 1861)**  
"Journal of Robert Knox Sneden, Vol. 1"  
Collection of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia

"Our soldiers left their comfortable barracks without a murmur, and they have fallen into line twice since our arrival, with a surprising intensity to go forth to battle. We had a pleasant time in Washington,



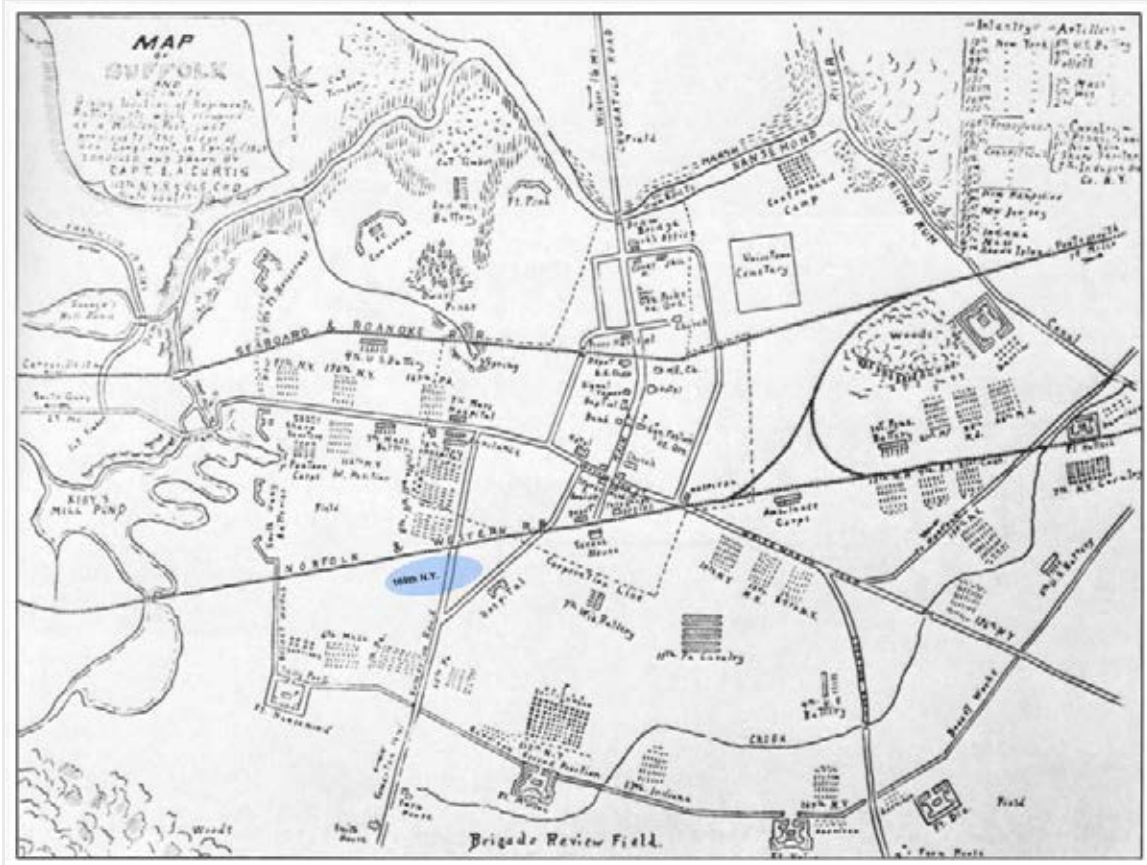
Detail from "Bird's-Eye View of Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and the District of Columbia"  
 Drawn and Engineered by J. Schedler, N.Y.  
 Published by Sarony, Major & Knapp, Lithographers, N.Y. (ca. 1861)  
 Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

and I had the sole command of the regiment while we were in the city, and I was assured we were commended by everybody as a model regiment. We won all the honors that kind of service could grant us, and I trust now we shall gain whatever of glory attaches to the battlefield. I am ready and willing to do my duty, and believe my coolness and want of fear (if such I can claim) will not forsake me. At all events, I pray it may not, no matter what the consequences."

The Union garrison at Suffolk, Va., was under siege from April 11 to May 4 by forces under Confederate Lieut.-Gen. James Longstreet. Longstreet, in command of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina, was assigned four objectives: (1) protect Richmond; (2) give support to Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia if and when needed; (3) forage and gather supplies for the Confederate armies; and (4) capture the Union garrison at Suffolk, if possible. Longstreet had three divisions of troops from the Army of Northern Virginia and North Carolina with which to accomplish his task.

Maj.-Gen. John J. Peck of New York commanded the Suffolk garrison, part of the Department of Virginia. The garrison was manned by a division from the VII Army Corps under Brig.-Gen. Michael Corcoran. When Longstreet's forces approached the city, another division was borrowed from the IX Corps under George W. Getty. A third division was transferred from the defenses of Washington, which included the 169<sup>th</sup> N.Y.

Upon its arrival in Suffolk, the 169<sup>th</sup> was assigned to the VII Corps (Maj.-Gen. John A. Dix); Peck's Division, (Brig.-Gen. Michael Corcoran); 2<sup>d</sup> Brigade, (Acting Brig.-Gen. Robert S. Foster; Col. Jeremiah C. Drake, 112<sup>th</sup> N.Y.). Other regi-



Map of Suffolk and Vicinity (ca. 1862-63)  
 Drawn by Captain Enoch A. Curtis, 112<sup>th</sup> N.Y.  
 Collection of the Suffolk Nansemond Historical Society, Suffolk, Virginia

*The above map was made prior to the arrival of the 169<sup>th</sup> N.Y. in Suffolk, the regiment's future location designated by the shaded area. Fort Nansemond is to the southeast.*

ments in the brigade included the 13<sup>th</sup> Indiana, 112<sup>th</sup> N.Y., 165<sup>th</sup> Penn., and 166<sup>th</sup> Penn. Infantry.

Two flotillas were sent from the Union's North Atlantic Blockading Squadron for naval support. Peck organized the Suffolk defenses roughly into a large circle, ringing the city, with the southwest front being led by Foster. Corcoran supervised the southern fronts and Getty supervised the northern fronts, and river defenses were left to the navy. Peck had a good, natural defensive position, with the Great Dismal Swamp protecting the eastern flank and the Nansemond River protecting the western flank.

Adj. Kisselburgh's interesting letter of the 17<sup>th</sup>, published in the *Daily Times*, described the dangerous circumstances in which the 169<sup>th</sup> found itself:

"The ball has at last opened vigorously, and with entire success to our arms. Night before last an expedition, consisting of six regiments, was sent down the Nansemond river, for the purpose of capturing a rebel battery, which had hemmed in two of our gun-boats, and which offered superior advantages to the rebels to enable them to cross the river and come in rear of the town. It failed, however, from some cause, and last night the attempt was repeated, with only two regiments, the Eighth Connecticut and Eighty-ninth New York, and was most successfully carried out. The infantry crossed the river above the battery, and pre-





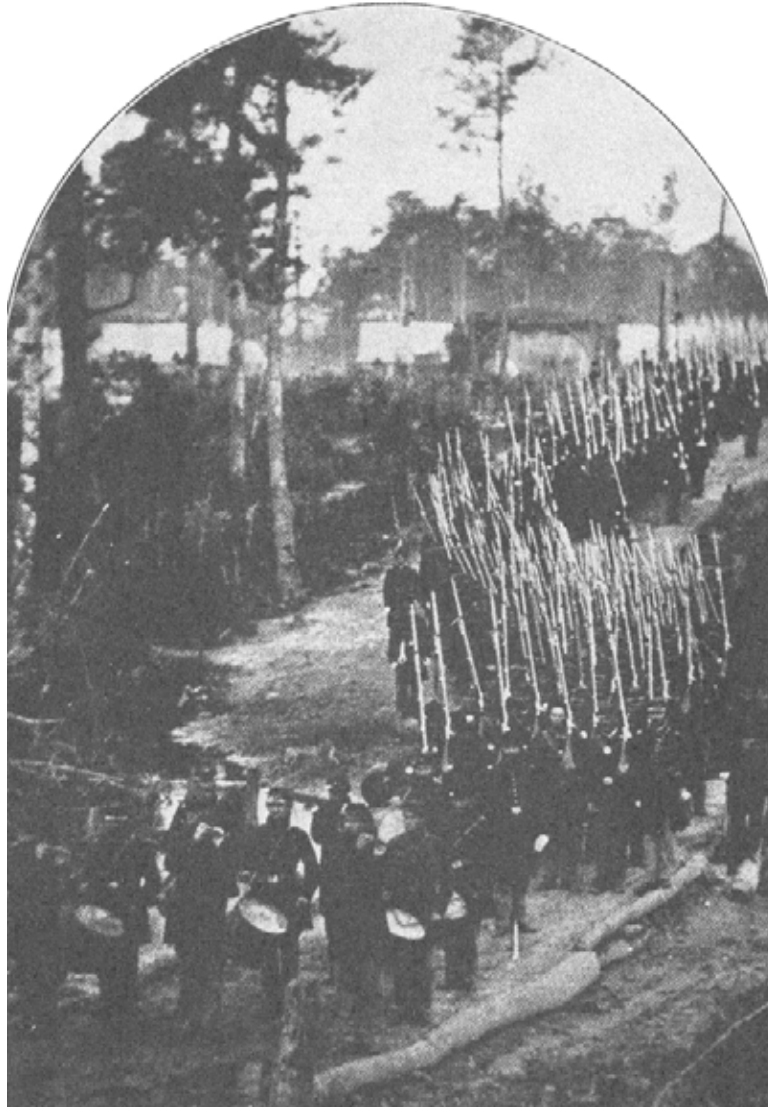
Suffolk, Virginia  
Published in "Harper's Weekly" (May 2<sup>d</sup>, 1863)

pared to storm the rebel entrenchments in the rear, whilst the gunboats shelled them in front. The boats opened vigorously, and so rapidly did they pour the deadly shot and shell upon the heads of the enemy, that it was impossible for them to work the guns, and before they were aware of the presence of troops in the rear of them, our infantry piled over the breastworks upon them, and nothing remained but a complete and unconditional surrender. It was a splendid *coup de main*, and in conversation with the rebel officers captured in the battery, it was so confessed by them. We took one hundred and thirty-five officers and men prisoners. The officers and men are a very intelligent and gentlemanly set; expressed themselves tired of the war, but said the South was bound to fight until its independence was recognized. They were well-clad, and exhibited pockets-full of green-backs. The men, however, were illy-clad, though they were all well supplied with shoes. About a dozen men were killed and wounded during the capture of the battery.

"Our regiment, the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth, was under arms twice yesterday, expecting to go out upon an expedition, but upon the capture of this battery, the order was countermanded. Private Merriam, for the second time in his illustrious history as a soldier, fell in the line and took a position in the front rank. He says that he intends to lay down his life way up on the very apex of his country's altar.

"The enemy's lines are being gradually brought closer and closer to the town, and the bullets from the guns of their sharpshooters have killed and wounded several within our lines. To the front of Foster's brigade, of which command the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth forms a part, the firing has entirely ceased, and the pickets of the opposing forces have grown quite friendly and talkative. To-night the firing from our gun-boats is very rapid and constant. The day, however, has passed very quietly.

"Yesterday, I witnessed a sight which would have melted the heart of any man. It was a poor negro, wounded in the hand, and carrying in his arms a little child not more than a year old, which had been shot twice,



once in the head and once in the leg, who had made his way through the enemy's lines, and had reached our camp, after escaping death at the hands of his 'masters' and their sharpshooters. A little boy, five or six years of age, followed his wounded father, but had escaped entirely unharmed. The negro hugged the babe to his bosom with motherly affection, and as he passed by I saw the blood drip from its little head down upon the ground, consecrating by its innocence this cursed soil of the Old Dominion. I wish I could describe the pleased expression of the old negro's face. There was no trace of pain in it from the wound he suffered; but the thought that he had escaped from the hands of his oppressors, and the oppressors of his race, was written in every lineament of his countenance. If ever a darkey's heart beat with joy, it was the long-burdened heart of this poor negro."

Gen. Alden would record in his memoir that the 169<sup>th</sup> "set upon the task of constructing rifle pits, forts and redoubts, with extensive lines of *abatis*, stockades and *chevaux-de-frise*, and every conceivable means of defence provided against sallies from the enemy's many strongholds and assaults, while they were besieging our positions with dogged perseverance and determination."



Map of the Siege of Suffolk, Va. (1863)  
 Drawn by Private Orrin S. Allen, 112<sup>th</sup> N.Y. (1826-1902)  
 Collection of the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia

*The map above depicts the location of Camp Griswold, the new home of the 169<sup>th</sup> N.Y., to the northeast of Fort Nansemond, which is designated by the large square outline. The location of the regiment appears to have been hurriedly penciled-in by the mapmaker. John A. Griswold, for whom the regiment's camp was named, was an industrialist from Troy, elected mayor of the city in 1856. He was an active Union man in the war, and assisted in raising the 30<sup>th</sup>, 125<sup>th</sup>, and 169<sup>th</sup> regiments of New York volunteers, as well as the Black Horse Cavalry and the 21<sup>st</sup> New York or Griswold Light Cavalry. Mr. Griswold also rendered effective aid to the Union cause by building, at great pecuniary risk, the celebrated "Monitor," which rendered such effective service in its conflict with the "Merrimac" in Hampton Roads.*

Col. McConihe continued in his letter of the 19<sup>th</sup>:

"The guns have been booming on all sides of us ever since our arrival, and the constant skirmishing directly in front is as plainly heard as if the guns were discharged in our own camp. It is but a very short distance from our camp to the newly constructed fort, called Nansemond, and that is immediately under the control of the Rebel sharpshooters. From their side of the river, in rifle pits and from stumps, they pop away with a great uncton. I rode down there yesterday, almost unconscious of the extreme dangers, when the bullets commenced whizzing and buzzing on all sides. 'Look sharp, Colonel!' exclaimed several soldiers, 'They kill men there!' and I immediately rode down under cover and safe from Rebel bullets. Dismounting, I crawled up to the breastwork and would look over and beyond, until I saw the smoke rise in a little blue stream, when down I would go, until the danger was passed. Thinking this no very great fun, I slowly rode back to camp, thinking what a horrid thing war is.

"A corporal of our sharpshooters was shot dead (through the head) while I was inside the said fort. Five men of ours have fallen there to-day, and the occasional boom of the heavy guns is kept up.

"We are strongly fortified, and feel confident of our ability to hold Suffolk. We expected to have a battle yesterday, and looked for a brush to-day. But the day will pass and there will be no fight. Their proximity to us is very annoying to me, and I certainly hope they will soon either *try* to come in or that we will go out and drive them off. A man can't walk one half mile in any direction but what some sneaking individual will throw lead at him.



Scrip note for two cents from the Verandah in Troy, New York

"Merriam is here, (shoulders his musket, and goes out in the ranks a private, has an endless flow of spirits, and an undaunted courage), and remarked on his arrival, 'Suffolk is a good ways from the Verandah, my boys!' showing thus the bent of his mind, and I might say too, 'Suffolk is a long way from McFarland Street.' But whatever my position, wherever my place, I will try to do my duty.

"We had lively firing of musketry last evening at sundown on the right, and occasionally to-day the heavy guns throw their death-dealing missiles with a sullen boom. How soon we shall have a battle, or whether we shall have one at all, remains to be seen. Let us hope for the best, and borrow no trouble.

"P.S. My arm is not healed-up. A piece of bone came out of the wound to-day."

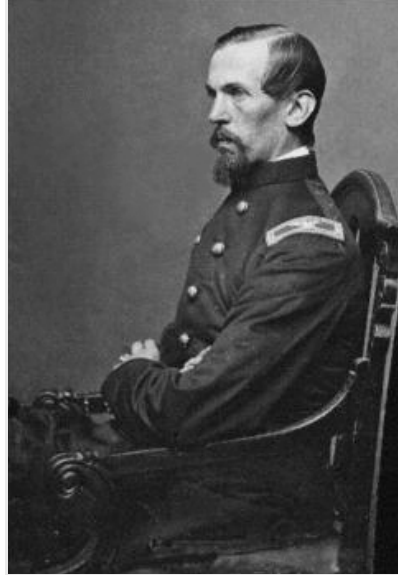
The casualties mentioned by Col. McConihe in his letter were not from his regiment. In a letter to his father on the 23<sup>d</sup>, he indicates that he had no idea of what the regiment would be called upon to do the following day:

"The Rebel pickets remain as heretofore, all around us, and their sharpshooters keep up a constant firing at us during the day, occasionally wounding and in some few instances killing a soldier. They do not seem to have changed their position or gained any advantage since we came here, and General Peck does not seem inclined to risk his forces outside the intrenchments. Reinforcements of infantry and artillery keep coming to us, and we must now have quite a formidable force.

"Our heavy guns boom day and night at intervals, and during the day the pickets pop away at each other with much earnestness. A stranger



**Major-General Henry W. Halleck,  
General-in-Chief of the Union Armies**



**Brigadier-General Michael Corcoran,  
commanding Peck's Division, VII Army Corps**

coming in would think an action was progressing, but we heed the noise with as little feeling as you do the discharges of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July at home. We turn out under arms each morning at 3 o'clock and remain so until daylight. This is to guard against surprise. Should the Rebels attack, they will meet with a warm reception. But I incline to my original opinion that they will never try it at Suffolk, and that to meet our enemies we must go out to battle. Of course, we know nothing of the Rebels or their intentions; neither do we know any more of our own general's plans.

"There is an excellent feeling, both among officers and men, and every call is responded to with alacrity. We are all ready to do or die for our country and our cause. The 169<sup>th</sup> especially is in the best of spirits and nothing has happened to mar the good feeling both of the men and officers since we left Washington. I have not heard a murmur.

"General Halleck looked in upon us day before yesterday, but did not remain over two hours. His comprehensive mind doubtless took in our situation in a few moments.

"We are flooded with rain. It has been pouring hard since midnight and there is no sign of its ceasing, yet the guns keep booming and the rifles cracking, as though it were a fair day.

"Colonel Foster of the 13<sup>th</sup> Indiana is commanding the brigade to which we are assigned. General Corcoran commands our division. He is very polite to us and is worshipped by his legion."

Corcoran's Irish Legion, also known as the 2<sup>d</sup> Irish Brigade, comprised several infantry regiments from the state of New York. In a letter on the 22<sup>d</sup>, Sergt. George M. Whitcomb, Co. D, and his brother Robert informed their parents that they were still in the land of the living:

"We are still alive and well and hope you are the same, but we are in a dusty place, for the cannons are roaring all the time. Our regiment hasn't had any general engagement yet, but the chances are that we will have a warm time here in a few days, but I hope to get out safe. There is more men here than you ever saw. The Rebels are in sight of us and they are firing at each other all the time. I have seen some of the Rebs



U.S.S. "Commodore Barney," flagship gunboat of the Lower Nansemond Flotilla (1863)

fall and some of the Yankees, and I don't feel scared yet, but father, I would like to come to Sandy Hill once more.

"I tell you, this is a great country. We are in the city of Suffolk and we can't get as much as a glass of beer. There han't anybody here but [Negroes], and it is the 4<sup>th</sup> of July all the time. The cannons are roaring this morning and it makes the city tremble. Father, we feel as well here in the battlefield, where they have been fighting for the last ten days, as we did at Salem. You had ought to hear the shells a bursting while I am writing this!

"I was onboard one of the gunboats yesterday and I saw them shell a large brick house all to pieces. I am well-acquainted with the captain of the gunboat. He used to run the towboat *Gage* from Waterford to sloop lock. His name is James Beal. He took me into his cabin and we took some whiskey. I tell you, it is a treat to meet a man here that you know, for we are a great ways from home and friends.

"Tell mother and Sarah to not worry about us, but hope for the best and pray for us that we may return to our homes, safe and sound. A kiss for all the children. Good-bye."

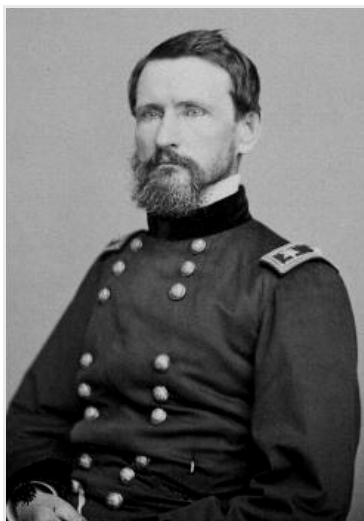
From April 11-18 there had been skirmishes every day around Suffolk, and on the 19<sup>th</sup> a detachment of the 8<sup>th</sup> Conn. and the 89<sup>th</sup> N.Y. landed on Hill's Point at the confluence of the forks of the Nansemond River. This amphibious force assaulted Fort Huger from the rear, quickly capturing its garrison, thus reopening the river to Union shipping.

Longstreet, realizing at this point that Suffolk would not be taken, ceased offensive operations against the Union garrison and concentrated upon foraging and gathering supplies for Lee's army, which would prove to be essential for the invasion of Pennsylvania that summer. The weather did its part to hamper the fighting, and the rain that fell from April 20-23 turned the roads and camps into muddy quagmires. The conditions made it impossible for the sharpshooters to engage in their deadly trade, but the shuddering blasts from the big 30-pounder naval Parrott rifles of the gunboats proved that the siege was not yet over.



**30-pounder Naval Parrott Rifle, Lafayette, Indiana**

Five small actions took place from April 22-May 1: at Chuckatuck on the 22<sup>d</sup>; along the southern front on the 24<sup>th</sup>; along the river on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>; and on the western front on the 1<sup>st</sup>, the purpose of which was to keep Longstreet tactically off-balance while the Confederates gathered subsistence from the countryside. Gen. Halleck, who had ordered the reinforcement of Suffolk with fresh troops from Washington, D.C., advised Peck during his visit on the 21<sup>st</sup> to do what he could to tie down Longstreet's Corps and prevent him from reinforcing Lee to the north. If successful, Gen. Hooker's Army of the Potomac might have a chance at crippling the Rebel army and seizing Richmond in a summer offensive.

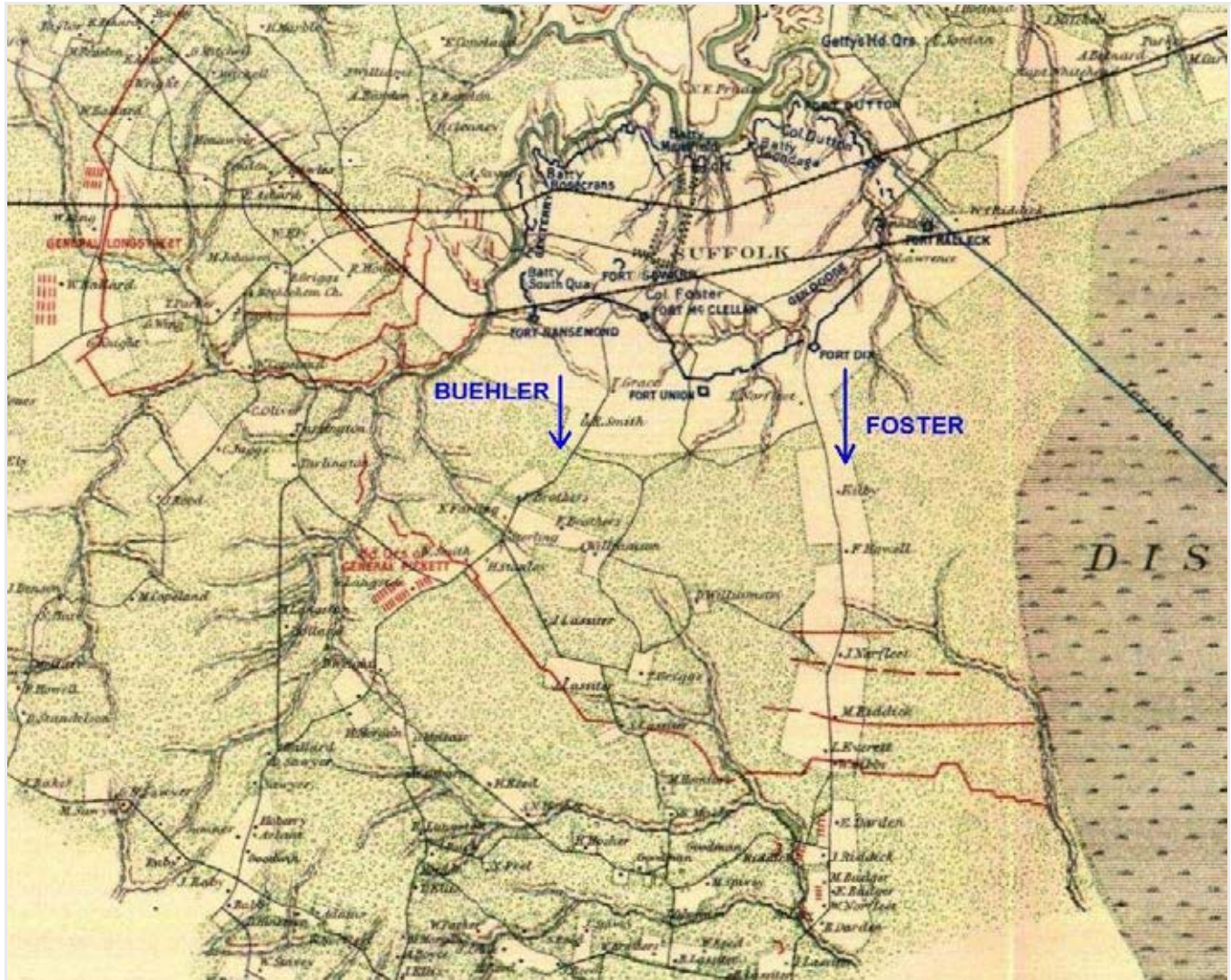


**Major-General John J. Peck,  
commanding the Suffolk Garrison**



**Acting Brigadier-General Robert S. Foster,  
commanding 2<sup>d</sup> Brigade, Peck's Division**

The rain was still falling on the 24<sup>th</sup>, but Peck would wait no longer to determine the strength of Confederate forces along Corcoran's front, mounting a reconnaissance-in-force from Fort Dix against Maj.-Gen. George E. Pickett's ex-



Detail from "Military Map of Suffolk and Vicinity, for Brig.-Gen. E. L. Viele  
 Surveyed and Drawn by 2<sup>d</sup> Lieut Oscar Soederquist, 99<sup>th</sup> N.Y.

Published in "Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies" (1891-1895)

trene right flank. Early that afternoon, 5,000 infantry under Foster, 500 cavalry under Col. Spear, and 10 field guns under Capt. Simpson, advanced southwards in line of battle along the White Marsh Road, (aka the Edenton Road), while a smaller force of 1,200 under Col. Charles H. Buehler demonstrated on the right along the Somerton Road. A large infantry reserve commanded by Gen. Dodge was placed between Fort Nansemond and Fort Dix, ready to rush to the aid of either Foster or Buehler in the event of a Confederate counterattack.

A narrative of the operation on the 24<sup>th</sup> is found in Steven A. Cormier's "The Siege of Suffolk – The Forgotten Campaign, April 11 - May 4, 1863" (1989):

"At Foster's command, the long blue column swung onto the muddy road, marching in 'double column, closed *en mass*' until it came within sight of the line of Rebel pickets two miles south of Fort Dix. The Rebel rifle-pits had been 'erected across the road and extending 100 yards or more on each side, and about 800 yards above Everett's house,' Corcoran noted. Beach's brigade then deployed into line of battle, the 16<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Conn. in a skirmish line to the left and right of the road,





**Reconnaissance by Buford's Cavalry towards the Rapidan River (September 14, 1863)**  
**Alfred Rudolph Waud (1828-1891)**  
 Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

the 15<sup>th</sup> Conn. and 13<sup>th</sup> Ind. in a line of support behind them. Next came the artillery, then Drake's brigade in column, followed by Murphy's brigade well to the rear. As Beach's lines moved up, Foster detached the 169<sup>th</sup> N.Y. from Drake's column and hurried it forward to support the artillery. Corcoran and his staff rode up and down the road, providing general direction during the entire engagement.

"While Beach's lines advanced against the screen of Rebel pickets, Corcoran called up the rest of Drake's brigade and two howitzers from Simpson's artillery. He sent them into line to the right of the 13<sup>th</sup> Indiana to prevent an envelopment of his right flank via the Somerton Road. 'No enemy appeared in front of this part of the line,' Drake reported. 'I threw out skirmishers to the front and found an apparently impenetrable marsh about 100 yards to our front.' Meanwhile, Corcoran ordered Murphy to send up the 164<sup>th</sup> N.Y. to support Beach's advance, and the rest of the Irish Legion to deploy into line of battle to the right and rear of Drake's brigade.

"Around 2:30 p.m., the fighting began in earnest as Beach's skirmishers locked horns with the Rebel pickets. 'The 11<sup>th</sup> Conn. under Col. Stedman,' on the right of the road, 'first encountered the enemy skirmishers at a farm house just when a farm road intersected into their line of march,' Col. Beach observed. This was probably the Elisha Everett house. 'I sent two companies of the 13<sup>th</sup> Indiana to reinforce



Col. Stedman at this point and they were thrown back to the right and rear of his line,' Beach reported. 'The 11<sup>th</sup> Conn. then advanced into the swamp a short distance in front of the road, driving the enemy before them and advancing to within a few rods of some low earthworks, when they received the fire of about a company.

"As the right of Beach's line pressed the Rebels, the left-flank regiments also drove them back toward their main line of earthworks. 'The 16<sup>th</sup> Conn. Vols. Advanced about a mile after meeting the enemy's skirmishers, continuously driving them,' Beach observed.

"The 15<sup>th</sup> Conn. came hot on the heels of their fellow Connecticut Yankees... and at that moment, the 11<sup>th</sup> Conn. on the Federal right tore into the Rebel skirmish line and opened the way for the left-flank regiments to continue their advance. 'Soon we heard a great yelling on our right,' Sergt. Marshall of the 15<sup>th</sup> Conn. remembered, 'and an officer came riding up, saying, "The right is carried. Forward!" We jumped up and over the fence and went tearing through the orchard and up to some out-houses with terrific yelling. Beyond the houses was an open, ploughed field and then a rail and brush fence and low pine woods, and there lay the Rebs. We stopped, all huddled up in crowds behind the houses for a minute or two, and then marched out, formed a line of battle, and started on a double quick and with yells towards the thick fence. I thought then by the time we got pretty near the fence we should get an awful volley. But no. The Rebs skedaddled through the woods and we scrambled through and over the fence and stopped just in the edge of the woods. By this time our skirmishers were nowhere to be found. We started again and soon reached the other edge of the woods. There we dropped behind a high rail fence as a Reb cannon right ahead about 600 or 800 yards across an open field opened on us and a ball went crashing through the tops of the pines. To the left of the field, about halfway up to the Reb battery, was a big white house, and from the house to the road which came out of the woods just beyond our right was an avenue of trees. The Reb battery had some six or eight guns and blazed away fast. Their balls all went over our heads



*The Richmond (Fayette) Battery was armed with two 10-pdr. Parrott rifles and four 6-pdr. guns.*

as they seemed to be aiming for our battery and not us. Our battery was in the road and in the lot behind the woods.'

"These Rebels were the 11<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 57<sup>th</sup> Va., and Capt. Miles C. Macon's Richmond Fayette (Virginia) Battery, under Col. John Bowie Magruder of the 57<sup>th</sup> Va. They were a provisional brigade of regiments from Armistead's, Corse's, and Kemper's brigades whose mission was to guard the far right flank of the entire Confederate line. When Corcoran's columns first appeared, Magruder hurried a warning to division headquarters, which in turn alerted general headquarters. Because of the size of the Yankee force, Magruder let his pickets withdraw through the forward lines of rifle pits but held firm at his main line behind Darden's Mill Pond.

"Sergt. George N. Wise of the 17<sup>th</sup> Virginia witnessed the withdrawal of the Confederate pickets. 'About 3 o'clock the pickets in front commenced a rapid fire and fell back slowly before a superior force of the enemy. Our artillery opened and was replied to from several places of the enemy's. We just had time to get out of our awkward position (in range of their guns) and cross the dam, when the Yanks came in full view of our line. Then shell and canister fell all around us,' Wise recorded in his diary that evening.

"Unwilling to turn a reconnaissance into a general engagement, and prevented to do so by his orders from Peck, Corcoran ordered Beach to halt his advance and prepare to withdraw his regiments under the cover of Simpson's guns. Meanwhile, Magruder's artillery opened up on the Federals. The astonishing accuracy of Macon's guns was noted by several participants. 'After we had driven the enemy from his first position the troops were exposed to a terrific fire from the enemy's guns and within easy range of all his guns,' Col. Foster observed. 'The precision and accuracy with which he delivered his fire was surprising, convincing me that the ground had been well calculated before the engagement began.

"Foster's observation was accurate. After Beach's Yankees drove them back to their main line of breastworks, Magruder's Virginians were ready for a head-on fight. But 'it did not come,' one of the Virginians lamented. 'It was not long before a shell from one of the Confederate's guns struck and exploded an ammunition chest of a Yankee gun, at which a wild cheer went up from the Confederate lines, whereupon the Yankees broke and ran for dear life, leaving a disabled limber and one or more dead men on the ground,' Lieut. William H.

Morgan of the 11<sup>th</sup> Virginia recalled. 'The captain of our battery had measured the distance from the breastworks to the point where the Yankees planted their battery, and knew exactly how to cut the fuse to do effective work. A Yankee detail returned the next day under flag of truce to get their dead, and said, "When you fellows raised that yell, we thought you were charging us, and we decamped in short order." The "Rebel yell" had terrified them again.'

'Another Rebel observer was even less charitable in his description of the Yankee withdrawal. 'So true was the aim of the efficient gunners, and so demoralizing in its influence upon the enemy, that they broke ranks, and, to use their own phrase, "skedaddled" in unmeasured haste, accelerated by deafening cheers from our soldiers,' Sergt. Wise insisted.

'Col. Magruder himself was no more charitable in describing the Union withdrawal. 'My command fought with distinguished gallantry,' he wrote to a cousin, 'playing sad havoc with their ranks, driving them back in terror and dismay, reaping many of the material fruits of victory such as overcoats, oil-clothes, blankets, haversacks, coffee, &c., &c., together with several watches and a good deal of money, taken from the persons of the dead.'

'The Northerners did not see things quite that way. Beach's regiments withdrew in good order, not in terror and confusion, Federal participants insisted. 'Some of the boys saw the Reb camp and their line of battle behind their battery,' Sergt. Marshall remembered. 'The order soon came to get up and fall back quietly. We did so, marching down more towards where our left had been. This was partly under a little rise of ground next to the swamp and out of range of the Reb guns.' Neither Marshall or Corcoran, or any of the brigade commanders say anything about a precipitate flight in the face of Magruder's resistance.

'Nevertheless, during the withdrawal Col. Spear saw something on the field that could be interpreted as evidence of a hasty parting. 'It becomes my duty to report that I found upon the field, near the enemy's rifle-pits, about 300 gum blankets and many haversacks filled with provisions, tin cups, plates, overcoats, blankets, etc., which belonged to our infantry, and were thrown away and abandoned when the firing commenced,' he reported to Corcoran the following day. 'Of these, I brought in as many as I could with one company, and on returning for the balance I was fired upon and forced to leave them in the hands of the enemy, and as the haversacks were filled with provisions, I presume they were very acceptable to the hungry rebels.' Sergt. Wise noticed the debris and believed, with Col. Magruder, that it had been 'improv-idently abandoned' by the Yankees 'in their precipitate flight' from the field.

'Beach's regiments joined Drake's and Murphy's units behind a new Federal line 'about a thousand yards' north of Magruder's position. Spear's cavalry and Simpson's artillery covered the infantry's withdrawal. As the Yankees fell back, they burned most of the houses still standing along the White Marsh Road. Behind his new line, Corcoran waited for the Rebel counterattack, but the prudent Magruder did not budge. 'They showing no disposition to follow and attack us on our ground, I gave the order to return,' Corcoran reported, 'and arrived in camp about half past five.

'Meanwhile, to the westward on the Somerton Road, Buehler's little column also pitched into the Rebels. 'Finding the enemy in considerable force near the "White House" [Brothers'], I engaged them, driving back their pickets to the rifle-pits in the rear of the house and the woods on the left,' Buehler reported.



**In Action**  
**Rufus F. Zogbaum (1849-1925)**  
**Published in "McClure's Magazine" (1897)**

Col. Colvin summarized the engagement from the 169<sup>th</sup>'s point of view in his historical sketch of the regiment:

"On April 24<sup>th</sup>, Gen. Corcoran was assigned to the duty of feeling the position of the enemy on the Edenton road, and ascertaining their strength. About three thousand troops, infantry and artillery, followed the Edenton road about five miles from the breastworks, and found the enemy in considerable force and strongly intrenched. The artillery opened, but with no other effect than to draw the enemy's fire, and with the aid of a little musketry, forced the enemy's skirmishers behind their strong breastworks.

"Four companies of the 169<sup>th</sup>, under command of Lieut.-Col. John McConihe, supported three pieces of Follet's Battery on the right of the road, and six companies under command of Maj. Alden, supported the other three pieces on the left of the road, both supports being under the general supervision of Col. Buel. After considerable cannonading it was found necessary to pass up through the woods intervening to a position in sight of the enemy's intrenchments. The three pieces of artillery with Maj. Alden's command were ordered to take that position, which was done under a heavy artillery fire from the enemy. Col. Buel accompanied Maj. Alden, but had no sooner reached the place designated than he was severely wounded in the hand and left the field. Col. Buel's conduct was characterized by remarkable coolness and indifference to danger, and he proved himself to be a brave officer. The position was maintained for about one hour, when the battery and its infantry support withdrew to the position of the other forces. Maj. Alden's command lost one killed and several wounded, the major himself having been wounded on the left thigh by a shell, and having his horse shot through the neck by a fragment of shell. Thus terminated the first engagement of the 169<sup>th</sup> with the enemy, and its conduct on the occasion was highly complimented in general orders from the brigade commander."

The day following the engagement, Adj. Kisselburgh described the events of the 24<sup>th</sup> in Suffolk in a letter to the *Daily Times*. Among other interesting details, he wrote that the regiment "fell back in excellent order and with perfect regularity" at the close of Corcoran's reconnaissance operation:

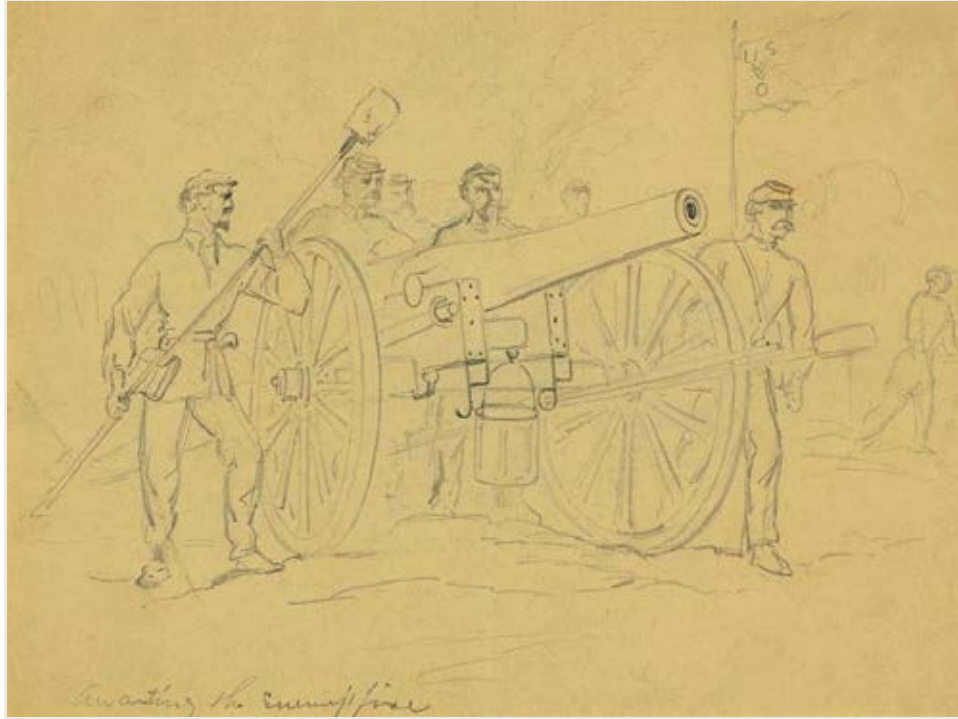
"Yesterday, our little regiment had its first fight, and gallantly did it sustain itself. We were in the advance, supporting the Fourth regular battery, Capt. Follett, (brother-in-law of W. C. Buell, of Troy,) and were pushed forward in the face of a most destructive and terrible fire. Federal batteries in rear of us plied their fires over the heads of our men, and Rebel batteries in front of us swept their shot and shell into our ranks and over our heads, and altogether it was a scene to try the souls of the stoutest and bravest men.



**Col. Ward's quarters (1861)**  
**Alfred Rudolph Waud (1828-1891)**  
**Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.**

"I will briefly detail the events of the day, at the risk of being somewhat stale to most readers, as the telegraph and official dispatches must, ere this reaches you, have been published. An expedition, consisting of about 6,000 infantry, a few squadrons of cavalry, and three or four batteries, under command of Gen. Corcoran, was sent out by Maj.-Gen. Peck, to reconnoitre the enemy on the Edenton road. The One Hundred and Sixty-ninth New York formed a part of this force. It was provisionally attached to Col. Drake's brigade, and was by him given the right of the line. 'Col. Buel,' asked Col. D., 'has your regiment ever been under fire?' 'No, sir,' replied our Colonel. 'Have you confidence in your men?' inquired the brigade commander. 'Perfect confidence,' was the reply, and on we were pushed to the front. After marching about six miles without encountering the enemy, the order, 'Double quick, One Hundred and Sixty-ninth,' was given, and with a yell our brave but untried boys pushed on, and took up a position in support of the battery above spoken of.

Two divisions, consisting of Cos. G, Capt. McCoun; E, Capt. Tarbell; I, Lieut. Snyder, (Capt. Parmenter being ill in Washington,) and F, Capt. Vaughn, formed on the right of the road, under command of Lieut.-Col. McConihe. The other two divisions, Cos. A, Capt. Colvin;



Awaiting the enemy's fire (ca. July 1862)

Arthur Lumley (ca. 1837-1912)

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

B, Capt. Nat. Wood; K, Capt. Ferguson; H, Capt. Wickes, and a portion of Co. D, under command of Major Alden, supported a section of the battery on the left of the road. An incessant fire was opened upon the woods, in which the Rebels were concealed, and in a short time they were forced back, and the battery supported by Major Alden took up a position in the road, directly in the woods, and immediately in front of a Rebel battery, which swept up the road. Our two divisions crossed this road by the flank, in the midst of a galling fire, and supported the battery at the distance of only sixty yards from the enemy. Col. Buel accompanied this division, and as he was crossing the road, a shell burst over him, one piece of which struck his bridal hand, cutting off one finger, and lodging in the palm, inflicting a severe and very painful wound. He was brought a short distance to the rear, though not out of the range of the enemy's guns, and sunk down quite exhausted and faint. It was my fortune to assist him out of danger, and to hear him complimented in the highest manner by Gen. Corcoran for his bravery and efficiency. Gen. C., after the return of the expedition to camp, sent up to inquire as to the condition of Col. B., and kindly offered him the accommodations of his headquarters. For upwards of an hour our boys sustained the fire of the whole Rebel battery without flinching in the least, or showing any disposition to break their lines. During this time, our battery was completely disabled, having only two men left to work it, and both of them were wounded. The order to retreat was finally given, and the regiment fell back in excellent order and with perfect regularity. As our boys fell out of the woods, the regiments in reserve cheered them, and showed by their admiring looks that the name of the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth was already dear in the hearts of all brave men. Major Alden's coolness and courage during the trying ordeal were the theme and admiration of all the men; and although struck by a



shell, and knocked off his horse, he still remained with his command, and by words of encouragement and the example he afforded, gave confidence and courage to all.

"The guns in rear of the advance battery, supported by Lieut.-Col. McConihe, continued the fire, and covered the retreat; and although it is impossible to tell how seriously the enemy was injured, the fact that he did not follow us up, but ceased his fire altogether, would seem to prove that the reconnaissance did him great harm.

"The divisions in charge of Lieut.-Col. McConihe were not pushed out as far as the two others, and sustained only a slight fire. No one was injured in this portion of the regiment, – the casualties being confined to Major Alden's division. I cannot speak in too high terms of praise of the conduct of both officers and men who supported the advance battery. Every man did his duty, and all stood up in the midst of the greatest danger with the courage and constancy of veterans. It would be idle to discriminate, as well as unjust; but Captains Colvin, Wood, Wickes and Ferguson, their Lieutenants and men, displayed the highest valor and patriotism. All honor to them. The other divisions, no one can doubt, would have shown no less heroism, had they been as actively engaged as were those I have enumerated.

"The following is the list of killed and wounded:

*Killed* – Private E. H. Brock, Co. H, instantly killed.

*Wounded* – Col. Clarence Buel, severely; Maj. A. Alden, bruised in left thigh; First Lieutenant John H. Hughes, Co. A, struck with shell; Corporal C. H. Noyes, Co. H, contusion of scalp; Private M. Falen, Co. B, wounded in hand; Private T. Fogarty, Co. K, wounded in hand; Private J. Kenelly, Co. K, wounded in arm.

"Sergeant Spaulding, of Co. B, had his accoutrements shot completely off of him, and a private from a Connecticut regiment, standing behind Capt. Wood, was blown to pieces by a shell. It is impossible to understand how it was that more of our men were not killed and





**The Army of the Potomac – Our Outlying Picket in the Woods**  
Published in "Harper's Weekly" (June 7, 1862)

wounded, except that the fire of the enemy was directed over their heads and fell to the rear of them.

"I must not omit to mention that Surgeon Knowlson and Chaplain Eaton were both prominent actors in the fight – the former professionally and the latter as a *curious* spectator. The little grey of the doctor dashed through the thickest of the fight, and many a poor fellow of our own and other regiments has cause to remember the Surgeon with gratitude for his care and attention. Dr. Clark Smith, our new Assistant-Surgeon, was also 'thar,' and to-day is screaming mad that the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth was not ordered up to charge and capture the Rebel battery.

"But where was Private W. H. Merriam? In the ranks, with his gun, double-quicking when the regiment double-quickened, laying down when the others laid down, as jovial and good-natured as when indulging in an emphatic drink at the Verandah.

"The record of the first engagement of the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth is before you, and no man who has the honor of belonging to this noble regiment need have cause to blush at his or its discharge of duty.

"Col. Buel, since the above was written, has received leave of absence, and will return home to recruit his health and recover from the effects of his wound. I wish you could understand how greatly he is beloved by every member of the regiment, and how deeply every man sympathizes with him in his misfortune. Many a Rebel, I opine, will have to answer for that unlucky shot, if the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth ever gets another chance at them. His bravery on the field was conspicuous and his bearing undaunted. God bless him, – for as a patriot and soldier there are none more devoted to our country's cause, or more fearless on the field of battle.

"The following order from Col. Drake, our brigade commander in the fight of yesterday, has just been received at regimental headquarters, and I send it to you:



**Colonel Jeremiah C. Drake, 112<sup>th</sup> N.Y.  
Commanding 2<sup>d</sup> Provisional Brigade, Suffolk, Virginia**

HEADQUARTERS SECOND PROV. BRIGADE,  
SUFFOLK, Va., April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1863.

*Special Order.* – The Colonel commanding the Second Provisional Brigade, desires to present his thanks to the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth regiment, New York volunteers, for their good behavior and gallantry in the action of yesterday, and his sympathy with those who sustained injuries. By command of

J. C. DRAKE,  
Colonel Com'g. Second Prov. Brigade.

Private Merriam provided an intriguing perspective of the action on the Edenton Road in a letter to the *Daily Whig*, which he began on the evening of the 24<sup>th</sup> and completed the following morning:

"This has been truly an historic day in the annals of the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth Regiment, being the first upon which Colonel Buel led his command to face the foe; and the sequel will show that the liberal confidence reposed in the regiment not only at home, but more especially among those who have been in authority over it since its advent at the seat of active operations, has been fully justified by its noble bearing beneath a really prolonged and terrific fire by an able and unscrupulous enemy.

"The One Hundred and Sixty-ninth, under command of Colonel Buel, left its camp this forenoon at about half-past eleven o'clock, in accordance with orders issued by Colonel J. C. Drake, commanding the Second Provisional Brigade, and reported at Fort Dix, at one P.M. This being done, an order was at once given to move out on the Edenton Road, leading directly to North Carolina. Soon after passing our old picket post, the first two divisions of the regiment moved to the right, and the two last divisions to the left of the road, in support of sections of the Fourth United States Artillery, (regular) commanded by Captain Follet, U.S.A., and a son of Hon. Frederick Follet, Ex-Canal Commissioner of our State. The left division, which sustained the brunt of the day, was composed of companies A, B, H, K, and D, under command



**Unidentified officer directing his men (ca. 1861-'65)  
Alfred Rudolph Waud (1828-1891)  
Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.**

of Major Alonzo Alden. Major Alden's command supported the left flank of Company D, Fourth Regular Heavy Artillery, and occupied the extreme front of our entire force, and was there throughout the entire day under a concentrated and terrific fire of four pieces of rebel artillery. – Major Alden displayed the utmost bravery, moving everywhere upon his horse beneath an almost complete canopy of canister and grape, especially directed to his devoted and gallant band, who, without exception, acted with the most daring coolness and exemplary fortitude under a galling fire. It was impossible that the battery entrusted to its support should fall into the hands of the enemy. It was at this point that the bright and glowing services of Lieuts. Cary, B. M. Smith, E. R. Smith, and Lyon, were especially noticeable and valuable. Of the company commanders on the left, Senior Captain James A. Colvin, of Company A, Captain Nat. Wood, commanding Company B, and Captain Ferguson and Wickes were remarked for their coolness, intrepidity, and determination in their new positions. Private Alexander Bell, of Company D, lately commanded by Captain Warren H. Coleman, now by First Lieutenant Walter Scott Birdsall, the commission of Lieutenant Snyder as its Captain not having yet arrived, exhibited marked bravery, as did, in fact, all the men of the wing, the woods over whose heads, and the rail-fences surrounding whom were literally riddled with the thickly delivered shells of the enemy, not a man flinched in the face of that awful and concentrated fire.

"Shortly after the action commenced, Colonel Buel's riderless horse was seen furiously dashing up the road, and a deep consternation became prevalent. Agonizing fears were entertained that our gallant and really beloved commander, who was known to be in the vicinity of the extreme front, in the discharge of his duty, might have fallen another victim of this insatiate rebellion. Lieutenant-Colonel McConihe, who commanded the right wing, immediately rode over to learn the



**9-inch shell fragments recovered by a metal detectorist at Suffolk, Virginia**

nature and extent of the casualty that had befallen Col. Buel. – On his returning, we learned that he had been painfully and annoyingly wounded in the left hand, and had been borne to the rear, whence he was tenderly conveyed to camp. While the deepest and most affectionate regret was experienced at the casualty, there was a universal feeling of joy that Colonel Buel was yet spared to us, to lead us in other conflicts. He is delirious to-night, and it is probable that he will be detained from command for some time. Major Alden was slightly wounded in the thigh, and his horse was shot directly through the more fleshy part of the neck. Adjutant Kisselburgh was calm and collected throughout the trying ordeal, and was remarked for his energy, in the conveyance of orders. The right wing of the regiment, composed of companies E, G, I, and F, were stationed on the extreme, in support of two, and part of the time three sections of battery, and was, as above stated, in command of Lieutenant-Colonel McConihe, who several times during the day was in consultation with General Corcoran. Colonel McConihe's bearing in front of the enemy was that of one familiar with such scenes. While the balls whistled all around him, he sat upon his horse, cool, and seemingly anxious for a closer contact with the foe. When we remember the gallantry displayed by Colonel McConihe on the memorable field of Shiloh, which he fully sanctified in the action of to-day, there is no room to doubt where he will be found in the hours of tribulation and conflict yet in store for the noble regiment which he, in part, commands. And this leads me to remark that the regiment is everywhere conceded to be highly favored in the character and ability of its field and staff. I shall speak more at length, however, upon this point, in my military notes, a liberal transcript of which I hope to send you in a few days.

"The first division supporting the right section of Follet's Battery, was in command of Capt. John T. McCoun, who, upon hearing of Colonel Buel's wound, eagerly besought Colonel McConihe to allow that portion of the battalion to charge into the woods. This was not considered feasible, but the suggestion does equal credit to the head and heart of the young Captain so earnestly making it. – Lieutenant T. B. Eaton was here honorably conspicuous. The second division of the same support was ably commanded by Captain A. D. Vaughn, assisted by



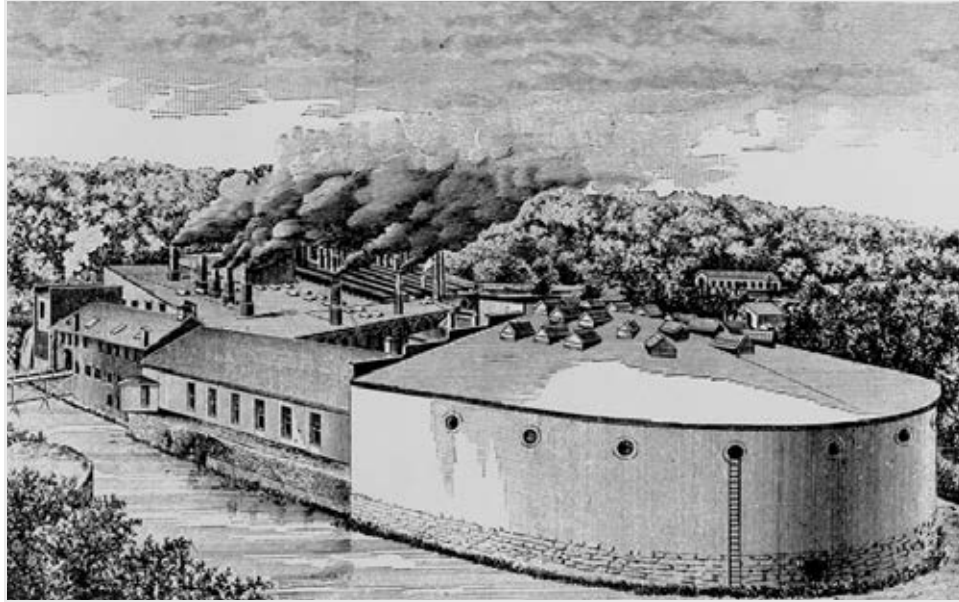
**1/6 Scale figure of a 57<sup>th</sup> Virginia Infantryman, wearing a slouch hat and shell jacket and equipped with a Model 1861 Richmond Armory Rifle-Musket  
Manufactured by Sideshow Collectibles, Thousand Oaks, California**

Lieutenant Snyder, Lieut. Birdsall, and Lieuts. Patrick Connors, Scriven and Jellico, all of whom acted well, and fully deserve this honorable mention. Among the many instances of noble daring displayed by the privates, I may mention the capture of a rebel rifle by private William M. Swartwout of Company G. Private S. met a rebel who had wandered from the rebel lines armed with an English rifle. Private S. immediately presented his pistol and said to him – 'here Mr. Rebel, dance this way, I want that rifle.' – There were no two ways in the matter, and the seedy secesh 'wilted'  *nolens volens*, under the sturdy glance of the gallant 'Swarty.' He is proud of his capture.

"The severe cannonading of this never-to-be-forgotten artillery duel lasted three hours, when our forces retired after a sharp and favorably decisive contest. I close with subjoining a complete list of the casualties of the day, in the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth, which I may here state were kindly and attentively cared for by Senior Surgeon Knowlson, and his assistant, Dr. Clark Smith, the new Assistant Surgeon of the command.

"Among the noteworthy incidents, I may mention that a shell struck Sergeant Spalding of Capt. Wood's company, and completely divested him of his equipments without doing him other injury.

"I cannot forebear mentioning that Sergeant-Major Van Santvoord, a brother of the late lamented scholar and jurist of our city, was in the thickest of the fray, throughout the day, nobly doing his duty.



Troy Iron & Nail Factory, Troy, New York.  
Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

APRIL 25, 1863.

"Colonel Buel is much better this morning, though not entirely free from pain. He leaves for home this noon.

"I must not forget, under this head, the manly and patriotic bearing of Company I, mostly from the Nail Works, and in the ranks of which your correspondent saw his first duty in the field, directly in front of belching cannon, and air flying shrapnel, I am proud of Company I.

"Our good friend, Chaplain Eaton, who is universally beloved and respected by the regiment, was on the field ready both to do his pious office, and if needs be, give prompt and holy aim to a piece whose effect upon the enemy would doubtless tell us that the sacred office, and the exploits of war, are no less than intimately blended in a cause supported by man and blessed of God.

"During the shrapnel storm, Major Alden discovered a gun upon the field without its caisson, and from which all the gunners had been shot save two, and which promised to fall into the possession of the enemy. The gallant Major thought to bear it away with his men. Addressing the Chief of Artillery, the Major asked – 'Shall I carry off that gun?' The two survivors said, before the Chief of Artillery could respond, 'There is only two of us left, and we mean to stick to the gun.' This incident is illustrative both of Major Alden's foresight and coolness upon the field, and the unselfish devotedness of the gallant gunners.

"Thus has the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth had its first experience in the glory of arms and the dashing and honorable advance."

Col. McConihe reassured his friends in Cincinnati that he was unscathed from the dangerous reconnaissance-in-force in Virginia in a letter on the 27<sup>th</sup>:

"I suppose you have, ere this, read the account of the battle on Friday on the Edenton road. The papers have not reached here yet, and I cannot say, therefore, what is published. But the 169<sup>th</sup> went out to battle, and has won the sobriquet of 'gallant.' It was a reconnaissance-in-force to feel the enemy, and learn his position and strength. Some

5,000 troops moved out, and an innumerable amount of shot and shell was expended on both sides. We *felt* of them and they of us.

"Our colonel, Colonel Buel, was badly shot in the left hand by a piece of shell, losing his third finger, and the missile passing through the palm of his hand, coming out on the back, near the wrist. He has been sent home to Troy.

"Our major was unhorsed and his animal badly wounded in the neck by a shell. One of our men had his head shot away by a solid shot, and some ten of them were wounded, including one lieutenant.

"Your humble servant rode his black charger at the head of the regiment, and came out unscathed in body or reputation. It was warm work for a short time, but the men and officers stood up in that hailstorm of iron like veterans. The regiment has been thanked in orders by the acting brigadier-general of our brigade.

"We are still surrounded, except in the rear towards Norfolk, by a large force of Rebels. Skirmishing is constantly kept up, and our heavy guns boom day and night. What they or we will do remains to be seen. If they attempt to assault us, the plains of Suffolk will run with blood. Their force is reported at 50 or 60,000, and ours about 25,000. They cannot surprise or whip us.

"The New York *Herald* has a reporter here, and will give all the news. In the absence of the colonel, I am commanding, so you can imagine I am quite busy. As to sleeping late in the morning, I have gotten over that. We get up in the dark at 3 A.M. each day."

1<sup>st</sup> Sergt. Frederick F. French, Co. D, wrote a friend on May 1<sup>st</sup> about the need for the Union troops to stay alert, as that was the day "set forth by the Rebel General Longstreet to dine in Suffolk":

"In this portion of Virginia, friend Thomas, my regiment is now encamped at the above-named place, a small village containing a population of about one thousand souls. This village is located on the south bank of the Nansemond River, 60 miles southeast of Richmond city, and about one hundred miles from Fredericksburgh. I am, in fact, in the very center of Rebeldom. Notwithstanding this village is small, it is worth fighting for, inasmuch as it becomes a great military depot for the army that may be strong enough to hold it. Thank God the Union army holds it at present, and if the strengthening plaster of the Union army is composed of fighting men and gunpowder, we will continue to hold this hamlet, and ere this month has passed into oblivion, we will add to it many more of superior size.

"Friend Thomas, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April, (the day on which your letter was written), our troops engaged the enemy at two points, *viz*, the Edenton and Somerton Roads. My regiment was on the left, under command of General Corcoran. We took the Edenton Road and marched about four miles, when we halted within rifle-shot of a piece of heavy-timbered land, on the margin of which is erected the enemy's breastworks. As soon as we made our appearance, we were saluted by a volley of Rebel musketry, together with a quantity of canister, grape, and shell. Our signal was instantly displayed and the ball opened. My regiment was in advance for the purpose of supporting a battery – this duty they performed to the letter.

"This was our first time under fire, and of course much could not be expected of us, but the boys, though green at the business, done well. So well did they, that the commanding general congratulated Colonel Buel on the noble conduct, bravery, and undaunted courage of the 169<sup>th</sup> Regiment. During the engagement and while our noble colonel was

gallantly leading us through the warmest of the fight, he was severely wounded by a piece of the enemy's shell, which struck his left hand and passed through, carrying away two of his fingers. Lieutenant John H. Hughes received a superficial wound caused by the bursting of a shell. His wound is very light. He will be able to return to duty in a short time.



**Confederate Lieutenant-General James Longstreet (ca. 1862)**

"Friend Thomas, as this is the day set forth by the Rebel General Longstreet to dine in Suffolk, our troops must be on the alert, lest he might make good his promise. Consequently, this letter will be a short one."

Sergt. George M. Whitcomb wrote his father about how he and his brother Robert came out of the engagement without a scratch:

"Well father, we have been in one pretty warm engagement since we came down here and came out of it without receiving a single scratch, and if you had only seen us two weeks ago last Friday, you wouldn't give much for our lives, but God in His own infinite mercy and goodness seen fit to direct the Rebels' balls in another direction and brought us out alright.

Robert avoided the subject of his first battle in a letter to his wife, focusing instead on the goings-on back home and what he had for dinner:

"Sarah, we can't get as good living here as we did in Washington, but we don't go hungry. I had green peas for dinner to-day and I thought of you and the boys while I was eating, but I don't wish you here, for it is bad enough for one out of the family to be here. But Sarah, I don't want for anything, only to see my dear little family."

Corp. James B. Randall, Co. F, fulfilled a promise to his parents before leaving Washington to not write again until the regiment had a fight:

"When we came here, I said I would not write until we had a fight, and yesterday we had one. We went out in the morning with 13 regiments and a heavy force of cavalry and artillery. We marched about six miles and formed a line of battle, and the 169<sup>th</sup> was in front and we had a hot time. We were under fire for two hours and then retreated in good order. Our loss was small, considering. Our colonel



lost his left hand; the major had his horse shot from under him; and two lieutenants were wounded with a piece of shell; one private killed; and a large number wounded. The enemy were in the woods and had rifle-pits at the edge of them. We first had to shell them and then we charged upon them and drove them back to their breastworks, and then they shelled us out.

"Two Rebs deserted this morning and they say that they have a large force ready for us, but they are starving, they say. We burnt three large houses yesterday also – one of them was General Longstreet's headquarters. We had a hard day of it – it rained all day."



On skirmish line – Officer turning to look at a dying soldier (ca. 1861-'65)  
Alfred Rudolph Waud (1828-1891)  
Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

In a letter to his sister, Sergt. Alfred Carmon, Co. H, expressed how fortunate he was to have survived the Confederate artillery:

"The Rebels are within a mile of us. We were in an engagement, the day before yesterday. The shells flew pretty thick and fast, I tell you, but we laid down on the ground and all the shells passed over us. We drove the Rebs about two miles through the woods, and then they made a stand. They was supported by three or four guns. They fired pretty sharply for a while.

"The battery that we were a supporting had all of their men but two killed or wounded, and the two that were left fired three rounds alone, and then they sat down on the gun carriage, to guard the gun. The shells kept a bursting around them but they would not leave their gun. We were first a going to draw the gun away, but they came in with their horses and drew it away.

"The shells would cut the trees right down over our heads. The most of them went over us. Once in awhile, one would burst ahead of us. The colonel got wounded in the hand with a piece of a shell. There was one of the boys from our company got killed with a shell. The top of his head was all blown off. He was killed instantly. Two of the boys took a hold of him to carry him out of the woods, but the shells flew so fast that they had to leave him. His name was Edwin Brock. He lived in Petersburg. He was as nice a boy as there was in the company. There was a corporal in our company that got wounded in the face, but his wound was not very serious, but it will mar his face considerably.

"We don't have quite so good times here as we had when we were in Washington. We don't have nothing but shelter tents to live in and hard crackers to live on. We get bread twice a week, and have plenty of potatoes and salted meat. We get fresh meat three or four times a week, and not much of anything to do but lay in our tents and sleep once in awhile. We have to go on fatigue. We have to get up every morning at three o'clock and stand in line untill daylight, when we go back to our quarters and sleep if we want to. We generally go to bed about dark.

"The folks in the village are not allowed to have any light at all after eight o'clock. If they are caught with a light after that time, they are marched off to the jail."

A week later Alfred would write again, this time with a differing version of the story by Priv. Merriam in the *Daily Whig*, concerning the reported capture of the Rebel soldier on the Edenton Road by Priv. William M. Swartwout:

"I saw a piece in *the Troy Whig* about that engagement that we were in. It said that one Swartwout met a Reb and drew his pistol on him and told him to surrender, which is a lie, for all the Rebs that he saw was a prisoner that some of the Indiana boys had taken, and he went up to the prisoner and began to abuse him.

"Our major is the bravest man that I ever saw. All of our field officers are brave, as well as they are good."

Col. McConihe issued a congratulatory order on the 25<sup>th</sup> to the men of the 169<sup>th</sup> for their gallantry while facing the enemy:



Lieutenant-Colonel John McConihe,  
Commanding 169<sup>th</sup> N. Y.

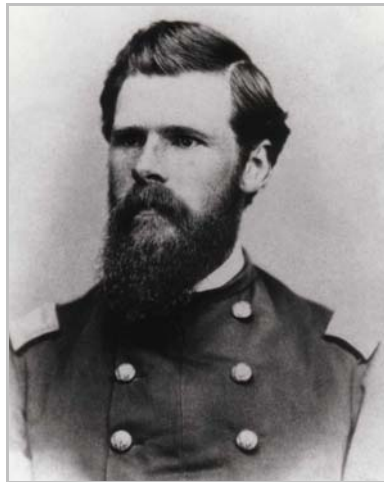
Collection of the Albany Institute of History & Art, Albany, New York

*General Order.* – The Lieutenant-Colonel Commanding the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth takes pride in commending the coolness and gallantry of the regiment during the action of yesterday on the Edenton road and while in the presence of the enemy. Although the first instance in which the command has been face to face with its foes, yet the noble conduct of all removes any doubt that might have existed, as to the undaunted courage and true heroism of the now truly gallant One Hundred and Sixty-ninth. You have nobly borne and fearlessly sustained the Flag of Liberty in the very front and heat of battle. You have unflinchingly met and driven back those who are in arms to overthrow

and destroy our rights, our liberties and our government. Soldiers of the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth, you are deserving of the good opinion of friends at home, who have entrusted to you the undying honor of upholding their liberties and protecting their rights. You are now true soldiers of the Republic. Yet the fight is not over, nor the victory won. There is much more to be endured, greater sacrifices to be made before our just and righteous cause is triumphant and peace restored to our land. Our cause is just and God will sustain us. Let us in the future as in the past be ever ready to do and die for our country, the home of the free and the asylum of the oppressed.

Your brave and beloved Colonel, who was so seriously wounded that he has been compelled temporarily to withdraw from the command, but let us hope, his absence will be of but short duration. His gallantry in the fight is in the mouths of all, and none gainsay his ability, bravery or goodness. There is none but that would willingly endure the pain to wear his honorable scars.

"Private E. H. Brock, of Co. H, gave up his life on the altar of his country, and though dead to us, he now enjoys peaceful rest in the army of the Lord. Brave men never die, and his hero spirit still hovers around and over us, clothed in light and crowned with a diadem of glory. See, he beckons to us to join the happy throng of gallant braves. His remains were tenderly laid in the cemetery near this city, and his sorrowful companions paid the last honors at his grave. Others were wounded in this action, and their names have been embodied in my report to the Commanding General, and proper notice taken of them.



**Major Alonzo Alden, 169<sup>th</sup> N.Y.  
Collection of the Collection of the U.S. Army Heritage &  
Education Center, Carlisle, Pennsylvania**

"Major Alden, commanding the left flank of the battalion, in support of a section of battery 'D,' Fourth United States artillery, (the other sections being supported by the right flank of the regiment under my immediate command and all being commanded by Col. Buel,) and which was separated from the right divisions by the Edenton road, reports to me as follows:

"It is with pleasure and pride that I am able to bear record of the bravery and gallantry that characterizes the conduct of both men and officers under my command, while facing the continuous and unabating shower of shell, grape and canister from the well-directed fire of the enemy. Every

order was cheerfully and promptly obeyed however imminent the danger involved.

"Such, soldiers, are the unanimous opinions of all, and the Major himself rode his horse fearlessly through that same shower of shell, grape and canister, being once unhorsed and the animal severely wounded in the neck by a piece of shell. The Adjutant, Surgeons, Acting Quartermaster C. E. Morey, and Chaplain were omnipresent and undaunted. But where all were brave I will congratulate all, thereby making honorable mention of each."

Priv. Brock would not be the only fatality of the 169<sup>th</sup> resulting from the engagement on the Edenton Road. 1<sup>st</sup> Lieut. John H. Hughes, Co. A, a highly-regarded young officer of the regiment, who was badly injured in the leg by a Confederate shell, died at Balfour Hospital in Portsmouth, Va., in late August, 1863. The *Daily Press* wrote in his obituary, "Lieut. Hughes was a brave officer, an estimable young man, the only son of his mother, and she a widow. He was severely wounded a few months ago, and had but just returned to his regiment when he was taken ill with a fever which terminated his earthly career. No sound shall wake him to glory again, but he will live long in the memory of all who knew his gallantry as a soldier, and his worth as a man."

An account of Lieut. Hughes' funeral was published on September 15<sup>th</sup>:



**Funeral march (1865)**  
**Alfred Rudolph Waud (1828-1891)**  
**Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.**

"A SOLDIER'S FUNERAL. – The funeral of Lieut. J. Henry Hughes, late of the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth Regiment, took place at Sandy Hill, Washington county, on the 7<sup>th</sup> inst., and was a most imposing ceremony. The religious services took place in the Catholic Church, and at their conclusion the remains were conveyed to the cemetery, preceded by the clergy, the Fort Edward cornet band, military, thirty-four ladies of Sandy Hill, and the Glen's Falls and Fort Edward fire companies, followed by a long train of carriages and citizens generally, the procession reaching nearly from the village to the place of interment. At the grave a beautiful hymn, entitled 'Who will care for Mother now,' was sung by the ladies and others in a manner calculated to soften the hardest heart, and call forth tears from eyes unusual to weeping. At the conclusion of the ceremonies at the grave the procession re-formed and marched to the late residence of the deceased, who was the only son or relative of his aged mother, who has the undivided sympathies of the entire community.

"The *Herald* says: 'We never saw so many people together who appeared so deeply impressed with the solemnities of the occasion, and where nothing transpired to cause regret.'"

On September 1, 1904, the *Troy Times* published a story about the 169<sup>th</sup>'s forty-second reunion at Averill Park, N.Y., in which Capt. Daniel J. Cary, president of the regimental reunion association, gave a moving address to the old veterans:



**The Awkward Squad (1886)**  
**Isaac Walton Taber (1857-1933)**  
**The Century Collection, New York**

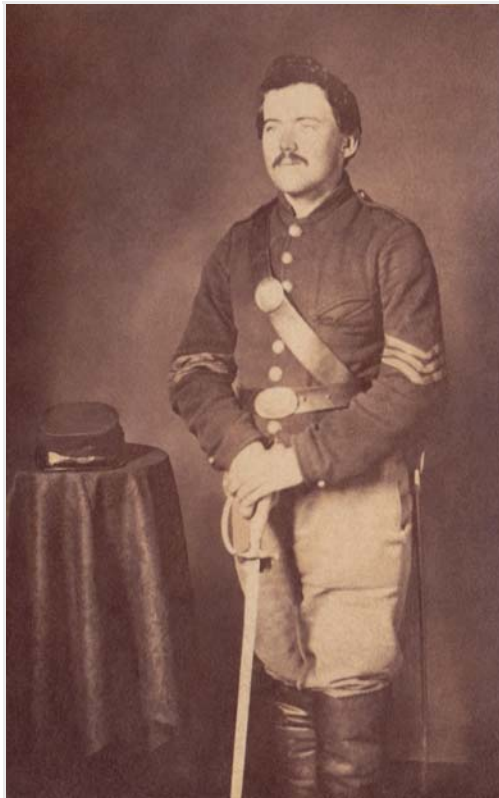
"Comrades and Friends: This is the anniversary of an event which transpired many years ago. You all remember the One Hundred and Sixty-ninth Regiment when it started for the front. We were boys, not only in years but in experience. As soldiers we were raw recruits, without drill or experience, and constituted an awkward squad. One thing only about military we knew, our country was assailed, the institution of liberty was imperiled, help had been called for and we had responded to the call.

"The next step in our history was the first battle. We did not dread the first battle, because we did not know what war was, and after that awful baptism of shot and shell, where some of our number performed the last duty of patriotism, completed the round of the patriot's life and left their bodies as an evidence of the sincerity with which they obeyed that call – but you can all remember the transition – after that battle we were no longer boys but men. We were no longer raw recruits but soldiers. And then came the next and the next and many succeeding battles. These battles we did not dread, because we did know what war was, but we knew also what we were fighting for, and we knew also the price that must be paid if we would win the great battle and succeed in our efforts to save the Union.

"More and more were taken from our ranks. The places of some were filled by new recruits. The places of some were never filled. And then came the glorious ending, the surrender at Appomattox, the mustering out, the return home; and behold, we were veterans!"

In the days following their first military engagement, the men of the 169<sup>th</sup> still had to contend with Rebel sharpshooters and the constant booming of cannons.

Corp. Randall wrote a letter to his sister in which he explained why his previous rank of sergeant was only temporary, pending the transfer of men from St. Lawrence County while the regiment was still stationed at Staten Island:



**Sergeant James B. Randall, Co. F, 169<sup>th</sup> N.Y.  
Provided by Rondus Miller, Historian/Curator of the Town of  
Hume Museum, Hume, N.Y., and kin of James B. Randall**

"We had a very hard rain last week and the water was two inches deep in our tents in the morning. It is the strangest country I ever saw. It rains so hard that it is impossible for the ground to take it as fast as it comes.

"You speak of me being second sergeant. When we left Troy I was, but it was for the time being, for the reason that we did not have a full company, and while we were on Staten Island, we had a lieutenant and 30 men added to the company, and they got all they asked for, for we wanted a full company. But it is all for the Union.

"O Mary, this is a splendid day as I ever saw! The peach trees are in blossom together with any quantity of wild flowers, and everything is quiet with the exception of the sharpshooters. They are continually firing at our men and camp."

In an official report to the adjutant of Foster's Brigade, Col. McConihe made mention of another reconnaissance operation conducted by the 169<sup>th</sup>:

"On April 28, Captain Vaughn, of Company F, was detailed for the purpose of making a reconnaissance through the Jericho Canal, which expedition was eminently successful, being made through an overflowed swamp, almost impenetrable on account of the depth of the water and the nature of the vines, brush, and timber, and at a time when the rain fell unceasingly for the two days (the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>) that the said company was absent."



**The Night Before The Battle (1865)**

**James Henry Beard (1814-1893)**

**Collection of Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York**

Your correspondent shall end this episode in our travel back in time with a remarkable letter written on the evening of the 29<sup>th</sup> by Col. McConihe to his friends in Cincinnati:

"The rain has ceased and the boom, w-h-r-r of its shot awakens me in Suffolk, in the midst of all the military scenes and incidents of war. Boom, again – there is the 64-pounder at work, only a few yards, about 50, from my quarters; buz-z – like the hissing of a serpent, the whirling shell rushes through the air; bang – a smaller gun sounds from the right; ho, ho; ho-o-o-o, ho, ho, ho, o-o-o----o-o; sounds like the bugle saying in sweet strains, go to sleep, go to sleep, go to sleep; to sleep, to sleep, to sleep. Dum, dum, dum; the taps are sounded on the bass drum, in a dull, dead strain. Whang – goes another gun; but so it is, Mrs. Newton, all night long, and during the day, the sharp crack of the rifle is heard in all directions.

"I never experienced a siege before, nor have I known what it was to feel that you could not walk abroad without having some dastardly hidden thing shoot at your innocent, inoffensive body. I have been on the bloodiest battlefield of the war, and calmly viewed its horrors, and eagerly participated in its excitements; seen men in black masses, sway to and fro in deadly combat, and had no feelings of contempt. But to walk up to our breastworks, and see the smoke of the rifle, ascending, as it were, from the ground, hear the buzz of the ball, and see *no more*, yet *know* that a miscreant lay in his hole, called a rifle-pit, and was thus cowardly striving to take your life; to see these things, rouses a man's baser passions beyond endurance.

"One of our shells, a good shot, landed in a pit to-day, and we soon saw five corpses of these dastards picked out by their companions-in-wickedness. It was a rare shot, and it is seldom we can hit them. But now and then, 'Hail Columbia' overtakes them. But I should not write these wicked things to you – it is not right – nevertheless, such were my thoughts, and I give them unheedingly, pardon me.

"To-day, a private in Co. 'A,' who had been sighting Rebels from our 'pits' the past 24 hours, presented me with a bouquet of wild flowers, gathered in his leisure moments, and as he was returning to his quarters. It adorns my rude camp table, and you, with me, can see in this little token that our finer feelings are not lost, and that the soldier can be as loving and tender to his cherished ones, can appreciate the beauties of nature, when opportunity offers, even in the midst of deadly scenes. I send you a flower from this bunch as a memento of Suffolk, and although it will have lost its freshness and fragrance when it reaches you, yet it will prove to you that there is a poetry, even in war.

"There, the rain is again pattering on the canvas, and all should be quiet on this dull, gloomy night. Thus, I will leave Suffolk and go back to other scenes..."

Presented for your review are the gravestones of several veterans of the 169<sup>th</sup> N.Y. at Oakwood Cemetery and St. Mary's Cemetery, beginning with the memorial for Col. Clarence Buel...



**Colonel Clarence Buel**

Oakwood Cemetery, Troy, Rensselaer County, N.Y.





**Private Samuel Lawrence, Co. C**  
Oakwood Cemetery, Troy, Rensselaer County, N.Y.



**1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant James H. Straight, Co. F**  
Oakwood Cemetery, Troy, Rensselaer County, N.Y.



**Private Lawrence Brady, Co. I**  
St. Mary's Cemetery, Troy, Rensselaer County, N.Y.



**Private Thomas Barrett, Co. G**  
St. Mary's Cemetery, Troy, Rensselaer County, N.Y.



**Private Thomas Connolly, Co. A**  
St. Mary's Cemetery, Troy, Rensselaer County, N.Y.



**Private Michael Finn, Co. K**  
St. Mary's Cemetery, Troy, Rensselaer County, N.Y.

Cheers,

- Steve Wiezbicki

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