



# The Dispatch



Newsletter of the

**Capital District Civil War Round Table**

P.O. Box 8874, Albany, NY 12208

Volume 11 Number 5

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## JANUARY PROGRAM

### ***IRON BRIGADE GENERAL***

by  
Mark Jordon

Capital District Civil War Round Table member Mark Jordon, co-author of Iron Brigade General, a biography of John Gibbon, will speak on "A Rebel in Blue." Mark's talk will provide a brief overview of Gibbon's life. However, the greater part of the discussion will center upon the feud between two II Corps noteworthies, Gibbon and his corps commander Winfield Scott Hancock. This little known incident will provide for an informative and interesting evening.

Mark Jordon is a consulting engineer in Troy, New York. He was a career officer in the Seabees, the Navy Engineer Corps.

### **JANUARY MEETING**

Friday, January 14, 1994

Bethlehem Public Library  
Delaware Avenue, Delmar, NY

Doors Open: 7:00 PM  
Program Begins: 7:30 PM

### **CDCWRT CALENDAR**

••• 1994 •••

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|------|----|--|
| JAN  | 8  | <b>Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: The Civil War in Art.</b> A free slide lecture at the NYS Museum by Harold Holzer.                 |
|      | 14 | <b>The Life of Major General John Gibbons.</b> Mark Jordon, author of a newly published biography of Gibbons.                        |
| FEB  | 11 | <b>The XII Corps at Gettysburg.</b> Chris Heidorf, author of Gettysburg: The 125th Anniversary.                                      |
| MAR  | 12 | <b>The Spring Banquet: Jackson's Failed Protégés.</b> Robert Krick, author of Stonewall Jackson at Cedar Mountain.                   |
| APR  | 15 | <b>Barksdale's Attack at the Peach Orchard: Gettysburg, July 2, 1863.</b> Captain Steve Hawley, History Department, USMA.            |
| MAY  | 13 | <b>Clara Barton.</b> Stephen Oates, author of biographies of Lincoln, John Brown, King, Faulkner and a recent study of Clara Barton. |
| JUNE | 10 | <b>A Civil War Medical Re-Enactment.</b> Alvan Jacques.  |



**Mike Aikey, Mark Bodnar, and Ray Smith** each made presentations as part of the December program. Reports from attendees say they did a great job, presenting unique and interesting aspects of the war. The excellent presentations are another example of the great talent and diversity we have within the Roundtable's membership. The January program will feature another of our members, **Mark Jordan**, who has co-authored a biography of John Gibbon. [You may remember that CDCWRT members **Mark Silo** and **Larry Hauptman** were the featured speakers at our September and October meetings, respectively.] Attending the monthly meetings is a wonderful opportunity to hear from and share your interests with other like-minded individuals.

#### **CDCWRT Election Results**

The composition of the CDCWRT board has remained largely intact after this past December's election. The board, headed by Chairman **Michael Barrett**, was re-elected for 1994.

One change to the board did occur, however, as past Chairman **Ray Smith's** ex officio inclusion on board now ends. (Ex-chairmen serve on the board as an ex officio member for one year after they leave the chairmanship). Ray, however, expects to continue to be active in the Round Table's activities.

Ray deserves every Roundtable member's thanks for his tireless efforts to support and build the Round Table into a quality, active, healthy organization. Ray's dedication, interest, and guidance on the board will be missed. Thanks Ray.

#### **APCWS Says Thank You**

The Round Table received a wonderful thank you note from Will Greene for our recent donation to APCWS for the Campaign to Save Malvern Hill and Glendale. The donation was part of the proceeds from our October bus trip to Manassas this past October. Our battlefield tour guide extraordinaire, **John Hennessy**, specified the proceeds be split between APCWS and the Save Historic Antietam Foundation (SHAF). The following are excerpts from Will's letter to CDCWRT Treasurer Mark Silo:

*Dear Mark,*

*Your letter of the 18th inst. reached our office this morning enclosing checks totaling \$1,105.88 for the Campaign to Save Malvern Hill and Glendale. On behalf of the officers and directors of the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites, please accept my sincere thanks for this wonderful gift to our Campaign. Yours is one of the most generous contributions we have received to date from a Civil War Round Table.*

*By copy of this letter I also want to thank our mutual friend, John Hennessy, for designating the Association as a recipient of these funds....He is much admired in these quarters, this latest gesture of his support only reinforcing our respect and gratitude.*

*The same kudos go out to the CDCWRT. Your group has consistently led the way in battlefield preservation and we have learned to count on our colleagues in Albany to answer the bell each time it rings. I've asked Mark Stephens to select a Troiani print to mail you for your use in an upcoming auction, so that token of our appreciation should be arriving soon....*

As of early December, APCWS had raised approximately \$182,000 of the \$288,000 due on January 8, 1994 in order to exercise the first option on the land.

## □ *2nd Bull Run Revisited*

Those on the recent bus trip to Manassas may recall **Bob Mulligan** speaking briefly about the death of Colonel Edward Frisby during one of our stops along the unfinished railroad on the second day of the tour. The following was submitted by Bob for those who were not in attendance.

### *A Note upon the Death of Col. Edward Frisby*

"Colonel, you are hit." Major Chrysler had noticed and hurried to his colonel's side. Now he could see the blood streaming from the shattered jaw; see the gauntleted hands tightened around the reins of his horse. "Major, to your post!"

Colonel Edward Frisby of the Thirtieth New York Volunteers had been urging his men forward. Again brandishing his sword, Frisby started his horse forward. His regiment was charging at the double quick, at the forefront of the Division: it would not do to have it fail at so perilous a moment; to fail in so public a manner.

But scarcely had Frisby "uttered the words of command, when he was struck on the top of his head with another bullet, which passed through and came out on the opposite side, killing him instantly."

Frisby dropped from his horse, and lay on the battle field, surrounded by 2 officers and 47 enlisted men of his regiment also killed at the great Union disaster which was the Second Battle of Bull Run. Two officers and 12 men would die of wounds after the battle, 4 officers and 76 men would recover from their wounds, and two officers and 34 men would be taken prisoner.

It was a harsh initiation to war for this virgin regiment, and later casualties would not even approach the severity of loss suffered on August 30th, 1862.

Edward Frisby was born in 1809 in the town of Trenton, Oneida County, New York.

Orphaned as a teen-ager, he came to Albany when he was 17 to live with a brother. He was apprenticed to John Mayell, a member of that prominent family of Albany hatmakers. Sober and hard working, Frisby went into business for himself, prospered; and married Mary A. Stevens in November of 1832. For amusement he served as an officer of the Militia. (You must remember that in the pre-electronic age, membership in fire companies, mandolin orchestras, church societies and yes, militia companies, was one of the means of companionship, entertainment and political influence.

Colonel Frisby commanded Albany's 25th regiment of Militia in 1856 when he was promoted to Brigadier General of the 11th Brigade, 3rd Division. He resigned in 1860 owing to advancing age. He was then but fifty one years old.

He accompanied the 25th on its three months of service when it set off for Virginia in response to President Lincoln's request for troops to defend the Capital in the early spring of 1861. The need for trained officers was so great however, that he left when he was offered, and accepted the command of the 30th regiment, then being formed in Troy for two years service.

The regiment saw little action, before and after Bull Run. But it was certainly in the forefront of the battle on that day. Frisby lay dead on the field for four days, until he was buried by the Surgeon of the 22nd New York Volunteers, and the grave marked. Most Federals were eventually buried in mass graves by the Confederates. The surgeon's marker allowed a deputation of Albanians to travel through enemy lines, locate the grave, and recover the body which was brought back to Albany.

There, on September 22nd, an immense throng of persons crowded the sidewalks of Broadway, as Frisby's body was borne on the horse-drawn trolley car, north to the cemetery entrance. Businesses were closed and minute guns fired, to mark the grief of the community, over the loss of such a prominent citizen. It was prophesied that

his fame would long endure, and the sacrifice of such a patriot would not be forgotten.

And if you have read this far, then Frisby is not forgotten: although his memory rests today upon no more than a time-worn headstone topped with an eagle, and a single chapter in an old and very rare book.

## *The Civil War in Art Featured in Lecture at the New York State Museum*

One of the nation's leading authorities on Civil War-era political culture and iconography, Harold Holzer, will present Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: The Civil War in Art, a slide lecture at the New York State Museum on Saturday, January 8 at 2 p.m. Admission is free. A book signing of Mr Holzer's recent publication, "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory," will follow the presentation.

Mr Holzer will focus on the rich visual archive that helped Americans visualize the battle and leaders of the Civil War while it raged and then served as a commemoration of the people and events for years to follow.

"Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory" is the first full-scale book on the art and artists of the Civil War. It is co-authored by Holzer and Mark E. Neely Jr., winner of the 1992 Pulitzer Prize in History for his study of civil liberties during the Civil War.

## **The Civil War Odyssey of the 115th New York (Part II) by Mark Silo**

*[The following was presented to the Round Table during our September 1993 meeting*

*by CDCWRT member, and officer, Mark Silo. A significant part of the program was an accompanying slide show. The following text has been edited to account for the lack of accompanying visuals.]*

On the first of March, 1864 the President appointed U.S. Grant as commander-in-chief of all federal armies, and the 115th quickly came under his influence. It didn't suit Grant's concept of all-out war to have too many troops committed to occupying remote territory; instead, he would bring maximum force to bear against enemy armies. Consequently, on April 16 the 115th New York found itself on transports once more and headed to Virginia, where they joined General Benjamin F. Butler's Army of the James.

On May 4, 1864, General Butler and his 39,000 men sailed up the James River without any resistance to Bermuda 100 -- a peninsula bounded on the south by the Appomattox River, and on the north and east by some sweeping curves in the James River. Bermuda Hundred was strategically located just 20 miles from Richmond and the vital turnpike and railroad which ran between Petersburg and Richmond straddled the western end of the peninsula.

When the force landed there was little to stop it from gaining Richmond or Petersburg, had they taken any sort of decisive action. However, the only decisive action that the political general Butler took was to begin throwing up earthworks across the neck of the Bermuda 100 peninsula.

On May 7 Butler did send a small force of men to disrupt the railroad. They would strike at a point known as Port Walthall Junction. Barton's Brigade and the 115th New York were with the advance on Port Walthall Junction.

On this day, as Col. Sammons was still disabled by his Olustee wounds, the regiment was led by Major Ezra L. Walrath. Nearly two years earlier Walrath was a full colonel commanding the 12th New York at the first battle of Bull Run. He was accused by his superiors of cowardice during the action. He had previously been

accused of having an illicit relationship with the wife of General Israel Richardson, his brigade commander. Whether the two accusations are related, I couldn't say. In any case, Walrath soon resigned his commission, but emerged a year later as an enlisted man in the 115th New York. He was later absolved of any charge of cowardice, but the resolution of the charge regarding Mrs. Richardson remains unknown.

The Port Walthall Junction engagement began with the Union line posted on a bluff and the rebel line posted behind a railroad. While the 115th was in line atop the bluff the Confederate artillery opened fire, and a solid shot hit Maj. Walrath's horse while he was mounted. The shot entered the left side of the horse's belly, just missing Walrath's left leg, and it exited through the horse's right side, just missing the Major's right leg. The horse was killed, but the men were amazed to see Walrath scramble to his feet and resume as if nothing had happened.

What ultimately did happen was an advance down the bluff and across a grassy open field. The rebels crossed the tracks to meet them and a close range firefight took place. Soon, however, the Confederates got men into position on the Union flank and the Yanks pulled back. It was during this withdrawal that the 115th suffered its heaviest casualties of the day.

The action at Port Walthall Junction was an outer fringe fight of the outer fringe campaign of Bermuda 100; but the 115th managed to lose 80 men. Among the wounded was Private Whitney Lee of Ephratah, Fulton County.

Port Walthall Junction was the only major action of the Bermuda 100 campaign for the 115th. They were on a reserve line during the campaign's major battle, which took place near the James River fortifications at Drewrys Bluff. Butler had finally advanced his entire army toward Richmond, and gotten pretty close. But then he paused and dug in, allowing the Confederates to seize the initiative, which they certainly did,

driving Butler back into the Bermuda 100 lines where he remained, in General Grant's well-known words, "as in a bottle, firmly corked."

On May 20, just three days after the Drewrys Bluff fiasco, Lt. Col. Nathan J. Johnson of Argyle, Washington County, joined the 115th. As Col. Sammons was still absent, Johnson assumed command of the regiment. That same day the 115th went on trench duty. Johnson made a great show of himself by moving beyond the trenches toward the picket line, where he:

*...reported to the officer in command of the pickets; he mounted on his magnificently equipped steed and fully exposed to the rebel sharpshooters....Then a minute later we heard the thud of a bullet and the horse went sprawling...stone dead.... Our new fledged and heroic Colonel then...stood, still exposed, and finishing his report to the officer indifferently returned to the regiment. [DeGraff]*

The regiment's new leader had made an impressive debut; however, the recorder of this incident felt compelled to add, "From our later experience with him I conclude he was at the time well reinforced with commissary whiskey."

The camps on Bermuda 100 peninsula would be the home of the 115th for much of the remainder of 1864; they were fated to venture out of their camps once each calendar month to do battle.

Their first such venture would come very soon. On May 29 they began a roundabout trip of 155 miles to reach a point just 15 miles away as the crow flies -- called Cold Harbor.

At Cold Harbor they would serve, briefly alongside the Army of the Potomac. Although the engagements at Cold Harbor were a defeat for the Union, in its little piece of the action the 115th New York had one of its more successful days.

*The boys  
felt ugly....*

They were still part of Barton's Brigade, which advanced against the entrenched rebels on June 1.

*We started forward with a long loud cheer on the charge. The boys felt ugly and determined to make a big fight, and to reach the enemy's works. With flags in the advance, we rushed through a piece of woods and over an open plowed field three quarters of a mile wide...and with a prolonged cheer of victory, without firing a gun, broke the rebel line, scaled their works, and with only 125 muskets, captured 250 prisoners.*

This recollection was by Lt. Clark, whose regimental history is not without a few doses of exaggeration. This passage, however, is well-corroborated -- they attacked across nearly a mile of open ground, captured a section of rebel works, and took more prisoners than they themselves had men.

At Cold Harbor the men felt a particular intensity. Perhaps it was pent-up frustration from the Bermuda 100 campaign -- they were well aware of the opportunities missed, and how poorly they had been led. Maybe it was this frustration what gave them a little extra juice at Cold Harbor. Capt. Fred Mosher of Fonda recalled feeling an:

*...insensibility to danger; I never felt that but once, and that was when we made the charge at Cold Harbor. After taking the first line of works I felt as though we could go through the entire Confederacy.*

Clark may have meant the very same thing when he said "the boys felt ugly."

If you go to the Cold Harbor battlefield you will find a jumble of trenches facing in every direction of the compass. It's impossible to

interpret with any certainty. [I found] one line that may very well be the one taken by the 115th. It is located in the area where they advanced and it has been reversed -- built to face in one direction and later modified to face the opposite direction. Well, the 115th spent the night in the rebel work it had taken that day and perhaps -- by this time having learned that digging was good for one's health in this war -- perhaps they reversed the line. [The one I found] may very well be it.

Anyway, they spent the night in this line but, without support from any other Union troops, they withdrew on the morning of June 2. They manned the trenches around Cold Harbor until June 12, suffering daily casualties from riflemen, shelling, and the sun.

They then returned to the camps at Bermuda 100 via the same circuitous route by which they had traveled to Cold Harbor.

Siege life had begun for the 115th. From this time until its departure for North Carolina in December the regiment spent most of its life in the trenches [of Petersburg]. All of the correspondents reflect the drudgery and danger of this existence, and all of them report the familiar aspects of the soldier's lot -- the pleasure of letters from home; the toll of disease; the informal truces and mingling with the enemy; mud, hunger, boredom, heat, and the daily dead and wounded. One suspects that it was actually a relief for the men when they would march away to battle. As I mentioned, they would do so once each month.

On July 29 they marched to Petersburg, where General Ambrose Burnside's 9th Corps was preparing for the detonation of the famous Burnside Mine and what came to be called the Battle of the Crater.

Men of Burnside's Corps -- a regiment of Pennsylvania coal miners -- had tunnelled...beneath no-man's land, and under the

*After taking the first line of works I felt as though we could go through the entire Confederacy*

Confederate lines. The shaft under the rebels would be filled with powder and detonated, at which time the 9th Corps would cross the lines, defeat the shattered rebels, and take Petersburg -- or so it was planned.

The 115th's Division of the 10th Corps would be part of this fight. The wee hours of July 30 found the men of the 115th in line behind the Ninth Corps men and prepared to advance, awaiting the mine explosion, which finally came at 4:45 a.m.

*The earth quakes. The very heavens above us are obscured from view. A dense, black column of smoke arises; the conflict has opened. A rebel fort has been blown in pieces, a regiment of traitors hurried into eternity in a moment's time....What a fearful thunder,*

is the dramatic recollection of Lt. Clark.

The 9th Corps advanced immediately, but confusion reigned and the Confederates soon rallied. By the time the 115th moved in, the rebs were putting up a stiff resistance. The men would go in north of the crater, with the 115th New York on the Corps' extreme flank -- from where they moved past the rim of the Crater and could look right into it.

This movement placed the 115th in a now-wooded area near the Crater. A soldier of the 115th described the regiment's action in a letter to the Fultonville Republican:

*We were soon ordered to advance, and we did so, passing the demolished fortification....The ground in front of us was plowed up on almost every foot of it, and as the grape and canister struck it, the appearance put one in mind of a body of water when it rains, the drops striking and rising up little pyramids on the surface.*

They didn't get far, and in fact were hampered as much by retreating 9th Corps troops as by the rebels. The 115th held a captured rebel picket trench until all other federal troops had been withdrawn, and then returned to Union lines.

Col. Sammons, who had returned to the regiment just one day before the Crater, was shot in the thigh by a rebel who fired on him from just 8 feet away. For Sammons the war was over. His thigh wound would disable him for further military service. It would not, however, disable him from getting himself elected to the New York State Legislature that Fall. [A] monument was erected in the Sammons family cemetery in 1899 -- 8 years after the Colonel's death. Lt. George Curren of Milton, Saratoga County, was also wounded at the Crater.

After the Crater the regiment quickly returned to its Bermuda 100 camps. For the rest of its stay in Virginia it would play a costly supporting role -- getting involved in holding actions opposite Richmond on the north side of the James River, while Grant made his main offensives south of the river, attempting to take Petersburg.

Each time it ventured off Bermuda 100 to do battle the regiment would cross the James over [a] pontoon bridge at Deep Bottom. The first such crossing was on August 15.

Fussell's Mill was the focal point of the action on August 16. While the mill itself is gone, the mill pond is still there. The 115th NY would move around this pond, which was right along the Confederate line.

On this day the brigade to which the 115th belonged was commanded by its own Major Walrath, the alleged lothario. [A map of the] movement of Walrath's Brigade [features a] large u-turn shaped arrow. [The map also shows how the] Confederate line forms a semi-circle around

the area of Walrath's advance; hence the u-turn, with heavy losses.

[The brigade advanced across a field.] The 115th was on the brigade's left. They were about 200 strong when they advanced. John Reardon wrote:

*Our loss in crossing the field is heavy. I think I never saw or heard the firing more rapid or continuous. The bullets passed in and around us like hail....The rebels were continually firing and yelling like Indians...*

The brigade got about 400 yards before bogging down and making their abrupt u-turn.

They had lost 73 men of their 200. First Lieutenant John Van De Sande of Fort Plain received a musket ball in the temple. He held on until October 3. His father and brother were with him when he died but he didn't recognize them.

Two young men from Halfmoon, 21 year old Abbott Musgrove and 20 year old Jimmie Himes, were both killed bearing the 115th's flags at Fustell's Mill.

At this point the normally upbeat Lt. DeGraff was moved to write:

*The 115th Regiment New York Volunteers, as fine and loyal lot of men as ever fought for their flag, have been in this war now more than two years, have been in almost continuous active service, fought in severe battles, and never won a victory.*

One can understand the frustration. This outfit suffered surrender at Harpers Ferry, imprisonment at Chicago, the Camp Douglas fire, and an idle year in the south. It had been in several pitched battles, each time on the offensive and each time performing very well. And each time, its side had been defeated.

The 115th would eventually have its day of glory, but not before a couple more fruitless, costly actions north of the James. The next would come in late September, when a thin line was sent against [a] strong rebel defense line east of Richmond, known as Fort Gilmer. But the formidable Fort Gilmer would not be taken by direct assault by a handful of men. DeGraff described this in a letter to his father:

*As soon as we got near enough to their works for their musketry they poured into us a cutting fire killing and wounding nearly every one who was in the advance, repulsing and scattering us to the winds....I did not think when we started we would take the line of works, but I did not imagine such terrible slaughter. We fell back and entrenched ourselves that night. [DeGraff to father 10/4/64]*

The regiment had suffered 33 casualties, among them Captain Egbert B. Savage of Saratoga Springs. A comrade recalled that "A 12-pound shell knocked [Savage] senseless, cut the back of his coat, severed his suspenders, and bruised his back badly." [Clark p. 250]

In October they would again feint toward Richmond, the 115th doing some heavy skirmishing along the Darbytown Road. It would lose only 20 men this time. Even so, bad luck would remain its constant [companion]. Many of these casualties were inflicted by men of the 9th Maine, which had just added a large number of new recruits. The raw Mainers responded to Confederate shelling by sending a panicked volley into the backs of the 115th. As Clark lamented, "That was far worse than being killed or maimed by the enemy."

The good news was that this would prove to be the 115th last fight in Virginia. After several weeks in the trenches east of Richmond, they again boarded transports and headed for the Atlantic -- bound for the Carolina coast.

*I did not imagine such terrible slaughter.*

This passage would be one of their worst. The regiment was placed in the lower hold, "amid beef barrels and other truck," complained Reid, who said he was reminded of "the middle ages in a Congo slaveship."

Their objective was Wilmington, North Carolina, which, by late 1864, was the last seaport remaining open to the Confederacy. General Grant was determined that Wilmington should be taken.

Key to the defense of Wilmington was Fort Fisher -- the so-called Gibraltar of the South -- which had been constructed on a narrow peninsula between the Cape Fear River and the Atlantic. Fort Fisher's sea face -- parallel to the beach -- was nearly a mile long. Its land face was 700 yards long, stretching across the peninsula from the river to the beach. Along its walls were 47 guns.

The fort's 25-foot walls were made of sand. At intervals along the walls stood perpendicular sand traverses 35 feet high. There were 15 of these imposing traverses along the land face. The 115th's Lt. Col. Johnson said these works made him think of "the works of the Titans." The fort's main weakness was that it was manned by an inadequate garrison of 1400 men. [CW Encyclopedia]

On December 14, 6500 infantrymen from Butler's Army of the James sailed out of Chesapeake Bay. Poor coordination between Butler and a supporting Navy fleet resulted in considerable delay, but, finally, on Christmas Day of 1864, with the Navy's Armada lying off Fort Fisher, Butler's fleet approached the beach five miles

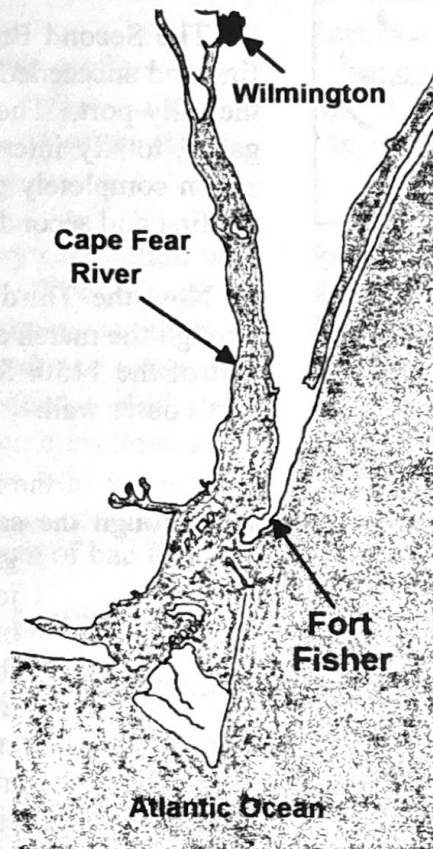
north of the Fort. The troops climbed down rope ladders into small boats, ...full of hilarity and enthusiasm at the novel idea of debarkation, and eager with delight to leave the pent-up quarters." [Reid p. 87]

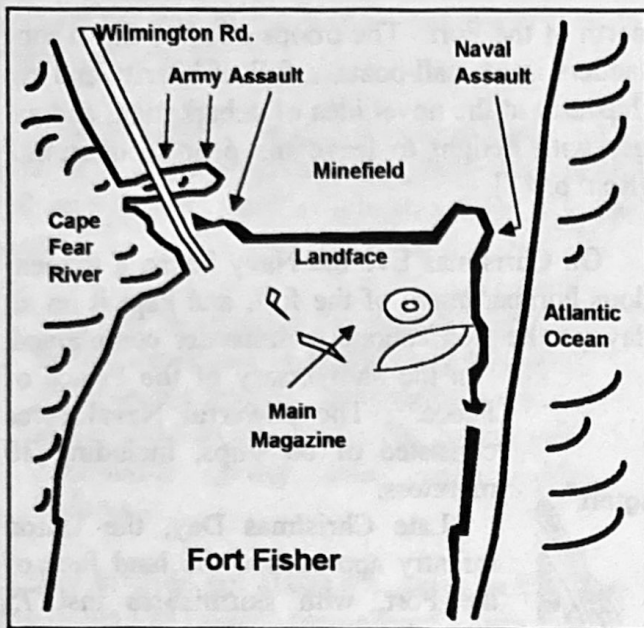
On Christmas Eve the Navy began a tremendous bombardment of the fort, and kept it up all day, as the Confederate commander complained, "on the anniversary of the Prince of Peace." The powerful Naval force consisted of 60 ships, including 30 monitors.

Late Christmas Day, the Union infantry approached the land face of the Fort, with skirmishers just 75 paces from the stockade. [O.R.: Curtis' report] The place was so lightly defended that an officer from the 142nd New York entered the Fort and carried off a flag which had been cut down by a Navy shell.

Suddenly, to the great surprise of the men, word passes that they are to withdraw. They quickly march back to the boats, re-board the ships, and embark for Virginia. Reardon wrote that the men called to mind the couplet "as we are so soon done for, it's a wonder what we begun for."

It was also a wonder to a frustrated Lincoln and a furious Grant. Grant quickly sacked Butler and replaced him with General Alfred Terry, and sent the expedition back out to sea. The 115th only spent enough time back in Old Virginia to march to its camps and find that their Christmas packages from home had been lost or stolen. They cross the familiar pontoons at Deep Bottom one last time, and are again shipboard by January 4. The journey and landing are repeated, the Navy again rains an epic bombardment on Fort Fisher, and on the afternoon of January 15 the infantry is once more opposite the Fort's land face ready to strike. But first a remarkable event takes place over on the beach.





The Navy was determined that it should play as great a role as the Army in taking the Fort. A call went out for volunteers to serve in a so-called "boarding party." 2000 sailors stepped forward, most armed only with revolvers and cutlasses.

The brave but hopeless boarding party attempted to storm the Fort at its strongest point -- the Northeast Bastion, located at the junction of the Fort's sea and land faces.

The plan called for the boarding party to go forward at the same time as the infantry, but its commander gave the "charge" order a bit prematurely. The ill-suited party went in with great dash and courage and came out with great losses. They had failed to "board" the Fort, but they had diverted many of the Fort's defenders from the land face over toward the Northeast Bastion.

A couple of hundred yards away, three brigades of infantry were poised in three lines parallel to the land face. The 115th waited in the 3rd line.

The 1st brigade to attack obliqued toward the river side of the Fort, where a

*Every man was his own commander, and realized he must win or die*

*... a glorious victory!*

bridge carried the Wilmington Road across a tidal slough and into the Fort's river side sally port. The port itself was defended by two pieces of field artillery, causing the Yanks to veer left and onto the Fort's sloped earthen wall instead of heading straight for the gate. They struggled slowly up the face of the wall and finally forced the defenders out of the first gun port. The flag of the 117th New York, from the Utica area, was the first hoisted on the fort.

The Second Brigade went in right behind the first and succeeded in taking the two field guns at the sally port. Then the men of the first two brigades, totally intermingled and with unit organization completely gone, pushed the Rebels out of the first and second traverses.

Now the Third Brigade came on. They ran through the marsh and across the approach bridge. Part of the 115th followed Col. Johnson onto the Fort's outer wall.

The rest of the regiment followed Major Walrath through the sally port. They crossed [over ground in the fort's interior] and joined the men of the first two brigades at the third traverse -- the whole Union force now a mob involved in hand-to-hand encounters at the crest of the traverse. Captain Mosher recalled that:"

*All organization at this time was completely broken. Every man was his own commander, and realized he must win or die."*

The traverses [traverses three through six] are taken in a slow, sanguine struggle, traverse by traverse, hand-to-hand, in the darkness. Men of the 115th made a point to note that they were at times in the forefront of the Union force. Lt. Col.

Johnson reported that all the officers and men of the force were "vying with each other in the

grand achievements of that memorable day...advancing along the works until they were taken and Fort Fisher passed into Union hands."

Walrath saw Color Sergeant Peter Keck, of Oppenheim, racing from traverse to traverse, trying to plant the 115th's flag ahead of the like-minded color-bearer of the 13th Indiana. Not until 10:00 P.M. did the firing cease -- the great stronghold had succumbed. Corporal Reardon said:

*It was a glorious victory. The soldiers are so elated they almost forget about sleeping...The boys spent most of the time until morning roaming about.*

The Navy joined the victory celebration with displays that lit the night sky. The men of the 115th no doubt felt a special elation at this point -- their first taste of victory had not come until January 15, 1865 -- but it provided a glorious final turnaround to what had been a regimental career of frustration. For those original recruits that remained with the 115th, Ft. Fisher helped heal two and one-half years worth of bad fortune.

Fort Fisher was the war's last battle for the 115th. It was just less than 11 months since their first battle at Olustee -- an 11-month war into which they squeezed 700 battle casualties.

But while they had finally beaten the Rebels, they still could not defeat Lady Luck. [The Northeast Bastion] is the area where the Fort's underground powder magazine had been located and where the exhausted men of the 115th finally regrouped and bedded down -- "some," as Reardon recalled, "never to arise in this world."

About 8:00 a.m. the magazine blew sky high. A court of inquiry later blamed it on some drunken marines seen roaming the Fort with lit torches. The 115th and a couple of other outfits were the victims. For the 115th, blast wounded around 40 and killed 10, [Phisterer] the regiment's final casualties of the great Civil War. One of the final victims was corporal John Watt of Halfmoon.

The final campaign saw some hard marching through North Carolina, and a junction with Sherman's army. The 115th was at Raleigh when, on April 26, Sherman accepted the surrender of Confederate General Joe Johnston at the Bennett Place near Durham.

"Great rejoicing. Our fighting is ended," is the simple diary entry of Lt. DeGraff. About 200 of the original 1100 men who left Fonda in August of 1862 were still with the regiment, including Cpl. Edward C. Buddle, of Canajoharie, Sgt. Alfred Gould, of Halfmoon, and Cpl. Fred Meyer of Ephratah.

The 115th was mustered out of the service at Raleigh, North Carolina on June 17, 1865. During their service, they had suffered 700 battle casualties. Another 200 men had succumbed to disease. They traveled over 8,000 miles, and battled tough southern soldiers, lousy northern generals, and some awful turns of fortune. and now they could head home.

As Lt. Clark wrote:

*The 115th reached Albany early on the morning of June 26th, and marched up Broadway in splendid style, while the cannon at the Capitol thundered a welcome. After being well cared for, the veterans marched to the barracks on the Albany and Troy Road....They then separated to their various homes, and the 115th Regiment ceased to exist, except in the memory of a grateful people.*

## **Welcome New Members!!**

James H. Shanley, Delmar, NY  
Don T. Birkmayer, Troy, NY  
Charles R. Nichols, Philmont, NY

## **HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

Created in 1984, the Capital District Civil War Round Table is an incorporated non-profit educational organization. Meetings are held monthly at the Bethlehem Public Library in Delmar, New York. This newsletter is published ten times per year. Annual dues are \$15. The purpose of the organization is to promote, educate, and further stimulate interest in, and discussion of, all aspects of the Civil War period.



### The Officers

Chairman	Michael Barrett
Vice-Chairman	Richard Becker
Treasurer	Mark Silo
Secretary	Sue Knost
At-Large	Robert Johnson
At-Large	Dan Lorello

### The Troops

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Newsletter	Robert Johnson
Preservation	Richard Becker
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