

# The 149<sup>th</sup> New York: Muster and Early Movements

-Brian Crater

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1862 Edwin Stanton, Secretary of War - United States, published a three point order from President Lincoln calling upon each state in the Union to raise 300,000 volunteers to aid in the war effort.<sup>1</sup> On August 5<sup>th</sup> this order made its way into circulation at the *Syracuse Daily Standard*.<sup>2</sup> Having failed to meet the state quota the previous month with the recruitment of the 122<sup>nd</sup> NYSV, Onondaga County sought to heed President Lincoln's call to arms; "On that never-to-be-forgotten day, it seemed to everyone that the time had come when every man must do something for the government, and, if possible, should offer himself in defense of the country."<sup>3</sup>

On August 20<sup>th</sup>, The War Committee of Syracuse began to raise a regiment within what was then the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congressional District.<sup>4</sup> Various members of the Committee established quarters throughout Onondaga County and began the process of recruiting men for service; A Captain in the regiment "erected a recruiting shanty on Hanover square" and attached "a large platform from which war speeches were orated daily."<sup>5</sup>

These three year men were organized at Camp White, located at the Onondaga Fair Grounds, just outside of Syracuse. On Monday September 8<sup>th</sup> those organized at camp, 'The Fourth Onondaga' as the locals referred, began to receive state issued uniforms (NYSV roundabouts) and just 10 days later, on the same day as the bloodbath at Antietam, they were sworn into service as the 149<sup>th</sup> New York Regiment. Throughout the week they continued to be supplied receiving knapsacks, canteens, and blankets.<sup>6</sup>

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> Camp White was shut down and military activities suspended as friends and families of the troops were invited for a regimental gala.<sup>7</sup> On this night of jovial fellowship many of the men were given gifts, their last tokens of home; and nearly all officers were presented by their friends with swords, belts, and sashes.<sup>8</sup> During the gala a regimental flag was presented by the Honorable V.W. Smith and was accepted by Colonel H.A. Barnum in a rousing speech.

Henry Alanson Barnum, a former Major of the 12<sup>th</sup> New York, was wounded at the Battle of Malvern Hill earlier that summer; Barnum was shot in the pelvis. His regiment left him on the field for dead, but miraculously he survived his wounds. Lacking modern medical technology, a doctor at the time told Barnum to place a rod through the wound until it was healed. The skin healed around the rod and they pulled it out. He lived with a hole in his hip for the rest of his life, but in a great deal of pain. Due to his condition, Colonel Barnum would be unable to join the regiment until January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1863.<sup>9</sup>

After the Festivities the State of New York colors were presented by the Jewish Ladies of Syracuse, and were received by the Republican Mayor of Syracuse, Charles Andrews.

The following morning they began their trek south via the N. Y. C. Railroad. Co.; "The memory of that embarkation is of very sad hearts, marching after awkward men in new uniforms, with the shelf creases in them, weighed down with knapsacks, blankets and canteens. Great anxiety about getting certain drunker men safely on the cars; excessive fatigue, and much disgust at the unmannerly conduct of certain citizen friends. It was a positive relief when the train got under motion..."<sup>10</sup>

The regiment arrived in Geneva and boarded three steam launches to travel Seneca Lake south to Watkins Glen, before boarding a train that would take them through Elmira, Williamsport, and Baltimore on their way toward Washington. While in Elmira, the regiment was issued British Enfield's, bayonets, and accoutrements, but no scabbards accompanied their leathers.<sup>11</sup> On their way from Elmira to Baltimore several regiments of newer recruits passed by, they were indeed men that had been surrendered by General Miles at Harpers Ferry; these men of war seemed "mortified."<sup>12</sup>

The regiment had made the final leg of their journey to Washington in the morning darkness of the 26<sup>th</sup> of September; Capt. Collins of Co. C recalled the experience in his post war account:

*"After crossing the State Line of Maryland the railroad was guarded by soldiers and every few minutes the train passed pickets and camp-fires. In and about Washington on every hand were the evidences of military occupation, dirt and filth marked every feature of the landscape surrounding the capitol building itself. Nothing presented itself to the eye of a stranger to impress him with awe and respect as one would anticipate, in approaching the capital of a great nation. On the contrary, everything was suggestive of devastation, chronic diarrhea, and body lice. There were a few sick paroled prisoners, in squalid condition, lying in the streets near the capitol building waiting to be cared for. ... Altogether the introduction to the Capital of the Nation and the Seat of War was not calculated to raise the enthusiasm of the men or stimulate their patriotism."<sup>13</sup>*

The soldiers were placed atop Arlington Heights overlooking the capital city for the evening. The soldiers described the city as "prominent" among the landscape. "The scene was surprisingly beautiful and the surroundings, novel." The sun set that day and soldiers began to pitch-in to a meal, write letters, and took part in soldierly banter. Around the hour of midnight the Adjutant rushed from tent to tent and said "You will pack immediately, we move at precisely eight o'clock tomorrow morning."<sup>14</sup> The soldiers were awake and drilling for two hours before the hour of eight a.m., and after most of the day being ready to go, the regiment received orders in the afternoon to 'Move at once and as expeditiously as possible.'<sup>15</sup>

The regiment once again boarded rail cars moving westward from Washington at two a.m. the following morning. By September 30<sup>th</sup>, just two weeks after Stonewall Jackson was victorious there, the regiment found itself at Bolivar Heights overlooking Harpers Ferry.<sup>16</sup>

To Be Continued Next Month...

\*Sources available upon request