

## SEVENTEENTH REGIMENT CONNECTICUT VOLUNTEER INFANTRY

The 17<sup>th</sup> Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry was recruited in response to President Lincoln's 1862 call for men willing to serve for three years, or for the duration of the Civil War. The war was not going well for the North, and Connecticut citizens knew there was a real possibility that their term of service would exceed three years. Governor Buckingham made a passionate plea for volunteers to fill Connecticut's quota.

In response to this plea, William H. Noble, a 49-year-old lawyer from Bridgeport, offered to raise a regiment from Fairfield County. Governor Buckingham accepted his offer and Noble's regiment was numbered the 17<sup>th</sup> Connecticut Volunteer Infantry. During its time of service, the 17<sup>th</sup> was credited with battles at Chancellorsville, Virginia, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Morris Island, South Carolina, Welaka, Saunders, and Dunn's Lake in Florida.

Col. Noble was a business partner of P. T. Barnum. (Barnum is most often remembered for his involvement in the circus.) The two men developed most of East Bridgeport and both men supported Gov. Buckingham. P. T. Barnum owned part of the land bordering Long Island Sound, which the 17<sup>th</sup> used for a training camp. (After the war, the land was known as Seaside Park.)



*The regimental flag of the 17<sup>th</sup> CVI.*

Before the 17<sup>th</sup> left Connecticut, the ladies of Norwalk presented them with two flags. The first was the regimental flag pictured on this page. It was purchased by the State of Connecticut from F. F. Rice at a cost of \$65.00. The second flag was their national color, which was funded by LeGrand Lockwood.



*Left: An enlargement of the remaining central device.*



*Right: An enlargement of the one remaining grape bunch. This bunch of grapes appears to have been painted hastily.*

Through the lobbying effort of some unknown person, the 17<sup>th</sup> was assigned to General Franz Sigel's Eleventh Corps. Unexpectedly, they were waylaid in Baltimore by General J. Wool and were sent to guard Fort Marshal instead. No provision had been made for their arrival so they were forced to sleep on the filthy ground with no shelter for most of the men. After more than a month of this treatment, Col. Noble lost patience and secured their release from Gen. Wool. They hurried to join the Eleventh Corps as part of the Second Brigade, First Division.

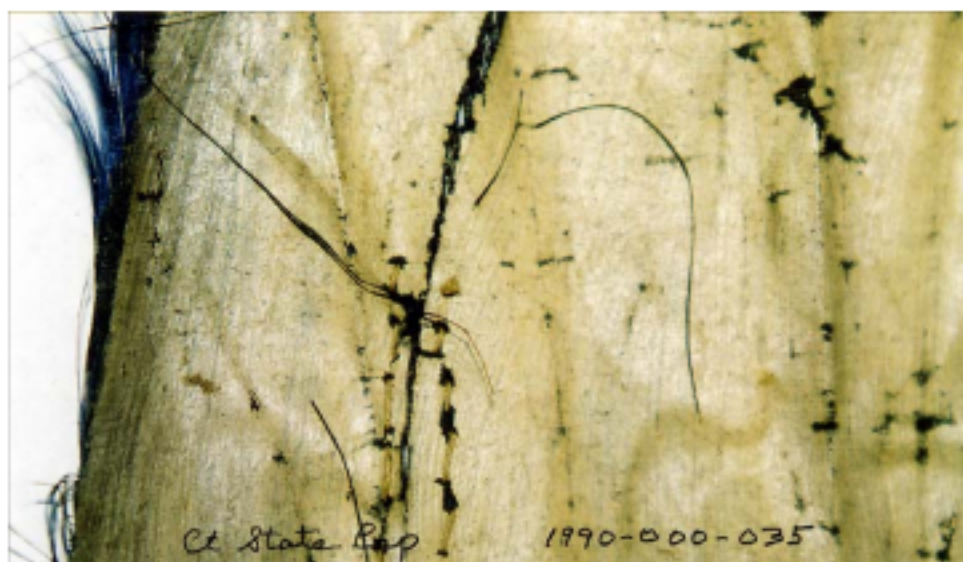
The 17<sup>th</sup> was not engaged in the disaster at Fredericksburg, but they did spend the long, cold winter with the Army of the Potomac that was camped on the Heights above the town. Gen. Robert E. Lee's army was also in his winter quarters in sight of Fredericksburg. As Pvt. Ransom Wingo, 13<sup>th</sup> Regiment South Carolina Infantry said in his journal, "We were camped on our side of the Rappahannock and the Yankees on the other, watching one another like two bulldogs." During April, Gen. Hooker, who had taken command of the Army of the Potomac in January, began implementing his plan to capture Fredericksburg and then move on to capture Richmond. Gen. Hooker left part of his army at Fredericksburg, assuming this diversion would keep Lee's army at Fredericksburg. With the rest of his own army, Hooker crossed the Rappahannock River further north, intending to swing around and catch Lee from the rear. Gen. Hooker positioned this part of his army along the Orange Turnpike and the Orange Plank Road where they built defensive positions while waiting for orders.



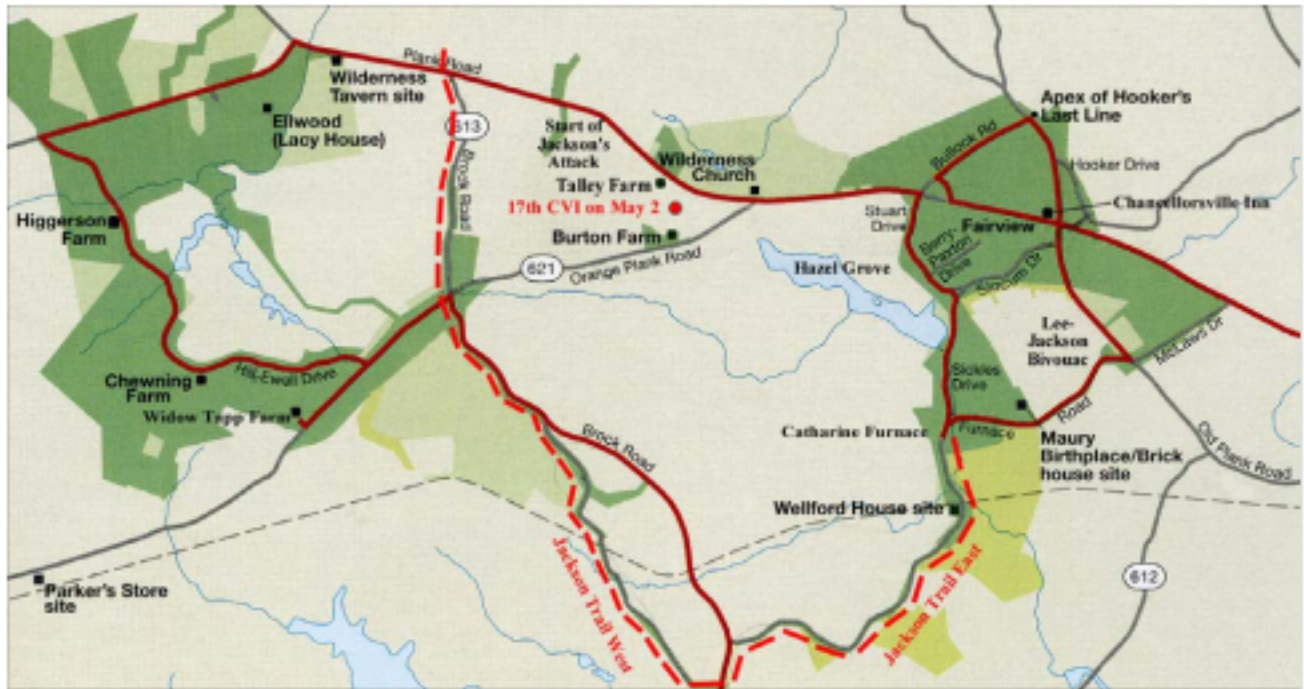
*Above left: What remains of the eagle's head and neck.*

*Above right: An enlargement of the eagle's eye.*

*Right: Note the stitch holes left from a previous repair to the neck.*



These roads by the Union Army went through a forest known as the Wilderness. At a crossroad in the Wilderness there was a tavern named Chancellorsville, which Hooker commandeered for his headquarters. He placed the Eleventh Corps at the western end of his four-mile line. Because the forest was so dense, he believed the Eleventh Corps was safe from attack from the west. On May 1, 1863, the Battle of Chancellorsville began, but Gen. Hooker refrained from enlarging the battle until he built more defenses.



*A National Park Service map of the Chancellorsville Battlefield. The red dashes mark Stonewall Jackson's route around the Union Army. The May 2 position of the 17<sup>th</sup> CVI is shown in red near Talley's Farm.*



*The above picture is an enlargement of the unit designation, which has survived on this fragmented regimentsal flag, making positive identification possible.*

Gen. Lee received reports of Gen. Hooker's movements and correctly guessed what Hooker was planning. In a bold move, Gen. Lee did the unthinkable. Early in the morning of May 2, he split his small army and sent Gen. Stonewall Jackson on a fast march westward, but far enough south of the plank roads to make some of Hooker's men think Lee was retreating. Gen. O. O. Howard, the new commander of the 11<sup>th</sup> Corps, did not understand the vulnerable position he was in; therefore, he made no defensive moves. In late afternoon of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the 17<sup>th</sup> CVI, which was camped on Talley's Farm facing south, and the rest of the 11<sup>th</sup> Corps, were overwhelmed by thousands of Confederates yelling their battle cry and shooting every one in their way. The shocked 17<sup>th</sup> CVI gallantly tried to hold their position. Col. Noble was hit and Lt. Col. Charles Walter was killed. With no one giving orders, they finally skedaddled eastward! Alman H. Ayers remembered seeing color-bearer C. Fred Betts waving his flag, and Capt. Fowler waving his sword over his head crying out, "Rally around the flag, 17<sup>th</sup>, rally around the flag!" A few men were rallied here for a short time, but then they fell back. In fact, the entire Eleventh Corps was disorganized by the attack, and Gen. Hooker's confidence was badly shaken. Brig. Gen. N. McLean, in his report about his brigade, which included the 17<sup>th</sup> CVI, said: "I can attach no blame whatever to my brigade for the disastrous results of the battle. ... In truth, the enemy came in great numbers so rapidly in pursuit as almost to be mingled with our own men in one mass."



*Above: The regimental color of the 17<sup>th</sup> CVI as it looked when it was removed from the cabinets in the Hall of Flags in 1985. It had not been viewed since 1879 when it was placed in the cabinets.*

*Right: Only the bottom of the finial survived the war. It looks as though the top was shot off in battle.*





*Cpl. George Martin Caughman*

Cpl. George Martin Caughman, of the 13<sup>th</sup> Regiment South Carolina Infantry, arrived on the field with the third wave of Confederates, which continued to pursue the Eleventh Corps. The debris of battle littered the road. The scene was described in *McGowan's Brigade*: "Arms and accoutrements were scattered by the roadside, the flesh and offal of newly-killed beeves lay thick, and here and there was a dead or wounded enemy. The sun set, but there was scarcely a variation of the sounds of the past hour. ... Piles of Federal knapsacks now strewed the way, and it required some vigilance to restrain our poverty-stricken soldiers from a general pillage."

The following day, Caughman was shot through the lung and shoulder and was left on the Chancellorsville battlefield among the Confederate dead. After the battle, he was found and sent to a Richmond hospital. He never completely recovered use of his arm.

Newspapers and others blamed the Eleventh Corps for the debacle at this part of the battlefield, but the 17<sup>th</sup> CVI continued to maintain that their retreat was orderly and a good decision. Gen. Hooker resigned as Commander of the Army of the Potomac on June 28, 1863.



*Cpl. James Middlebrook of Cos. F and D holding the national flag of the 17<sup>th</sup>.*



*Cpl. Robert N. Perry of Co. F. Cpl. Perry was 18 years old when he was wounded at Gettysburg.*

*Copies of the above pictures can be found at the Burroughs Library, Bridgeport, CT. The original owners are unknown.*

The national flag that was presented to the 17<sup>th</sup> CVI at the same time they received their regimental flag was a gift from Company F. The sleeve on the staff is inscribed: "17<sup>th</sup> Connecticut/by/ Lockwood Guard/Norwalk, Conn." LeGrand Lockwood gave \$1,000.00 to Company F and apparently they used part of the money to buy a flag for the regiment. They also chose to call themselves the Lockwood Guard. The flag is one of the most beautiful in the Capitol collection. It is doubtful that the large hand-embroidered stars could be duplicated today.



*Left: The national flag of the 17<sup>th</sup> CVI.*

*Below: An enlargement of part of the brass plate on the staff.*



The 17<sup>th</sup> CVI also fought fiercely at Gettysburg. They suffered 206 casualties—more than any other Connecticut unit. When the battle began, on July 1, 1863, four companies, under the command of Maj. Alan G. Brady, were sent across Gettysburg to the northwest of town as skirmishers. Their instructions were to hold the bridge across Rock Creek. The other six companies of the 17<sup>th</sup>, under the command of Lt. Col. Douglas Fowler, were told to charge the approaching Confederates at a hill north of Gettysburg, later called Barlow's Knoll. Col. Fowler told them to scream and yell while making their charge against the approaching Confederates. Fowler was killed in the charge, almost immediately. Both groups of the 17<sup>th</sup> fought well, but to keep them from being surrounded their brigade commander ordered them to retreat. The command of the 17<sup>th</sup> now devolved onto Maj. Brady, who formed another battle line in the town. Finally, the worn out 17<sup>th</sup> retreated with the rest of the Union men to Cemetery Hill. Gen. O. O. Howard saw them with their colors and asked if there were troops brave enough to advance to a stone wall across a lot in the direction of the town. The reply was, "Yes, the 17<sup>th</sup> Connecticut will!"

Unfortunately, in spite of careful research by the National Park Service at Gettysburg, some of the

details about the 17<sup>th</sup> CVI in the battles of July 1 are not known. Maj. Brady might be a part of the problem because his official report is somewhat obscure. Long after the war, Pvt. W. H. Warren collected information from veterans of the 17<sup>th</sup> in an effort to write a regimental history. Unfortunately, he died before completing his work. The following disjointed comments come from Warren's research.

Cpl. Henry Burns was seen holding the regimental color in one hand and swinging his hat in the other, yelling as loud as he could, "Rally 'round the colors, boys, rally 'round the colors!" Cpl. Burns was shot in the head and fell on the color. Pvt. Cyrus Raymond rolled Burns over and picked up the color. Although colors are supposed to be a rallying point for the regiment, color-bearers usually did not shout these words. Since this is the second time verbal instructions for rallying were shouted in battle, the words must have been used during their training.

Cpl. J. Middlebrook, who was with the colors on Barlow's Knoll, wrote that it was amazing they weren't all shot down since they were a large, visible target.

In 1898, James Ainscow wrote, "When Batchelder dropped the colors, John Hayes picked them up and was wounded. Then C. Fred Betts picked them up and carried them off the field. While in his hands a shell exploded and carried away three stars in the blue field. (The stars were worked on with silk.) The staff was shot away about six inches below the bottom of the flag. Betts carried the colors off the field by the aid of this six-inch stump."

Careful checking of the dates the men were wounded leads to the conclusion that all the facts in the letter are not accurate. However, over the three days of the Battle of Gettysburg, all the men mentioned did at sometime hold the colors. Also, the bottom of the staff of this national color is mismatched and there are missing stars.



*Left: This monument was dedicated to the 17<sup>th</sup> CVI for their participation in the battle on Barlow's Knoll on the first day at Gettysburg.*

*Right: This monument was dedicated to the 17<sup>th</sup> CVI for their participation in the battles on the second day at Gettysburg. Part of the wall defended by the 17<sup>th</sup> is visible in the background.*





The 17<sup>th</sup> CVI finished out 1863 with a tour of duty on Morris Island and Folly Island in South Carolina. At the end of February 1864, the 17<sup>th</sup> was sent to Florida.

As Confederate states seceded from the Union, the various governors ordered the surrender and confiscation of federal forts and property in their states. However, Fort Pickens, which is on an island in Pensacola Bay, successfully resisted the takeover by Confederates and remained Union property throughout the Civil War. By 1864 the rumors from Florida made President Lincoln believe that there was enough Union sentiment in Florida to attempt to set up a loyal state government. Union troops landed at Jacksonville and pushed westward to cut Confederate supply lines. The Confederates, who were ready for them at Olustee, prevented any further progress. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> CVI was sent to Jacksonville after the battle at Olustee, their engagements consisted of raids into the interior. During May of 1864 at Welaka and Saunders, Florida, where Co. B of the 17<sup>th</sup> was on picket duty, the Confederate guerillas captured both posts. (Florida remained a Confederate state.)



*Left: Picture of the battle damage to the fly end of the national flag.*

*Right: A close-up of a portion of the above picture showing what appears to be bullet damage. Note the careful hand embroidery.*



During December of 1864 Col. Noble was returning to St. Augustine from Jacksonville where he was testifying in court when his carriage was attacked and he was captured. When Lt. Col. Wilcoxson heard, he commandeered all the horses he could find and sent out a search party. Col. Noble could not be found. The Confederates had already started with Col. Noble on the long journey to Andersonville. He was treated reasonably well, but he was not a young man any longer so the trip must have been difficult for him. He walked long distances and also used available conveyances such a boats and trains. The prisoners and their guards reached Andersonville in late February 1865. William Warren included in his unpublished manuscript an interview with Col. Noble, giving the details of his trip and his incarceration at Andersonville.



*Above: Note the damage to the staff and the bent brass mounting rod which was more than likely caused by a bullet. The hand embroidery of the star is visible in this picture.*

*Pictured to the right is the same national flag of the 17<sup>th</sup> Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry after conservation work was completed in 2002. It was mounted on China silk with the missing portions dyed a little lighter than the original flag. It was covered with a sheer layer of nylon and the three layers were then stitched together. It is on exhibit in the Hall of Flags at the Capitol.*

The last conflict for the 17<sup>th</sup> CVI was near Lake Dunn, Florida. On February 3, 1865, six companies of the 17<sup>th</sup> set out to find cotton rumored to be stored at a place a day's march from St. Augustine. They found the cotton and started back in a leisurely manner. When Confederate cavalry surprised them, they never had a chance to escape. Young Adjutant Chatfield would not surrender and consequently he was killed while resisting. Col. Wilcoxson was wounded and died in captivity. Thirty-two men were captured and sent to Andersonville Prison.

In his last official report after the war, Col. William Noble said, "This regiment returned to Connecticut a noble body of men, who will in peace make for the Commonwealth most efficient citizens, and who, at the call of their country, will ever be ready to defend her honor and her flag."

