

**Sgt. Edward M. White (a.k.a. Edwin M. White) of
Co. H, 86th NY Infantry, and Co. B, 179th NY Infantry,
and his Civil War Bull's Eye Canteen**

The Bull's Eye Canteen

A soldier could not last very long in the field without food, water, and shelter. During the US Civil War these were essential elements in keeping a soldier healthy and ready to fight. Even so, sickness during the Civil War took more soldiers' lives than did battle and so the Union Army had to provide its troops with the basic necessities. One such necessity was the water-filled canteen. The issue canteen had a very distinctive appearance. Two corrugated tin metal halves were soldered together to form a disk with a soldered-on bottle neck and a cork stopper on top. It was carried by means of white linen strap held on to the circumference of the canteen by three soldered-on metal loops. To prevent loss, the stopper had a metal ring on top with a small metal chain attached to one of the top loops. The canteen was covered with a wool fabric "Union blue" cover to insulate the contents and keep the tin canteen from "clanking" against other accouterments. The stamped corrugated metal gave the sides of the canteen rigidity, and was in the form of concentric rings, giving it the appearance that every marksman knows as the "bull's eye." Even with a canteen, the quality of the water in it mattered too.



Figure 1. Sgt. White's Civil War "Bull's Eye" Canteen



Figure 2. Sgt. White's Name Inscribed on the Canteen Neck

The Union “bull’s eye” canteen with soiled blue wool cover, linen strap, and cork stopper shown in Figure 1 was purchased on 10 Apr 1999 at an antique show in Chantilly, VA. The canteen was from an Ithaca, NY, family estate, and the canteen tin metal neck had the inscription “E. Whit” as shown in Figure 2. The seller explained that the Civil War canteen belonged to a man named “E. White” from either the 86th or 81st New York Regiment. This information was passed on from family descendants of the soldier, along with some other related artifacts, to the seller.

The Soldier

How rare that such a simple item as a canteen could have family history and provenance. This raised questions about the canteen’s original owner and caused the “new owner” to investigate the claimed provenance using the extensive Civil War service and pension records at the National Archives in Washington, DC – at the time not available “on-line”. Several men with the name “E. White” were found in the records but only three “E. Whites” were connected to NY regiments. One was 21 year old Edwin White of the 81st NY, born in Richland, NY. He was a deserter almost as soon as he signed up. It is unlikely that he would have been issued a canteen, or, if he had, he probably would not have hung onto anything connected with the Army. The other men were Edwin M. White of the 86th NY Infantry Regiment and Edward M. White of the 179th NY Infantry. A thorough review of Edwin White’s service and pension records revealed that “Edwin” and “Edward” were one and the same person! In fact, at the death of Edward White, his widow, Margaret White, in her Declaration for Widow’s Pension (Figure 3), mentions that Edward had belonged to the 86th NY under the first name of “Edwin” and later the 179th NY Vols. as “Edward”. Why he chose two different names is still a mystery.

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DECLARATION FOR WIDOW'S PENSION.

Act of April 19, 1908,
Amended by Act of September 8, 1916.

STATE OF New York, COUNTY OF Steuben

On this 9th day of December, 1919, personally appeared before me, a Notary Public,
within and for the County and State aforesaid, Margaret E. White, who, being duly
sworn by me according to law, declares that she is 74 1/2 years of age and that she was born September 16th, 1845
at Brook Camp, Cayuga Co. New York
That she is the widow of Edward M. White, who enlisted September 13th, 1861,
at Trappenburg, Steuben Co. N.Y., under the name of Edwin M. White
as a private (Rank.) in Co. H - 86 Reg. New York Vol. Inf.
(Here state company and regiment, if in the Army; or vessels, if in the Navy.)
and was honorably discharged May 10th, 1862, having served ninety days or more during the CIVIL WAR.
That he also served Enrolled March 10th 1864 Private Co. B - 179 Reg
New York Light Artillery discharged June 8th 1865
(Here give a complete statement of all other military, naval, or coast guard service, if any, at whatever time rendered.)
That otherwise than as herein stated said soldier (or sailor) was not employed in the United States service.
That she was married to said soldier (or sailor) March 30th, 1864, under the name
of Margaret E. Nye, at Trappenburg, Steuben Co. N.Y.,
by A. M. Burrill J.P.; that she had not been previously married; that he had not
been previously married
(Here state all prior marriages of either, and give the names and dates and places of death or divorce of all former consorts.)

Figure 3. Sgt. White's Widow's Pension Declaration

Service and Pension Records Details

Edward M. White's military service was not unlike the service of many other Civil War soldiers who fought for the Union. Transcripts from Edward White's service record are quite detailed, and reveal much about his appearance, background, health, and service during the war. A farmer by trade, he was born in Troupsburg, Steuben County, NY, and was described as 5 feet 6 inches tall, light complexion, gray eyes, sandy hair, and a weight of 140 pounds. On 13 Sept 1861, at 18 years of age, he enlisted under the name of Edwin M. White as a private, Co. H, 86th NY Volunteer Infantry, sworn in by Captain Tenbroeck at Elmira, NY. Figure 4 shows Pvt. White's service record muster-in roll. Unfortunately, his initial service with the 86th NY was very short-lived because of serious illness, and he was discharged with a medical disability on 10 May 1862.

<p><i>N</i> 86 N.Y.</p> <p><i>Emin M. White</i></p> <p><i>P. Sgt. Tubero Co., Steuben Rangers.*</i></p> <p>Age <i>18</i> years.</p> <p>Appears on</p> <p>Company Muster-in Roll</p> <p>of the organization named above. Roll dated <i>Sept 13, 1861</i>.</p> <p>Muster-in to date <i>Sept 13, 1861</i>.</p> <p>Joined for duty and enrolled <i>Mustered</i></p> <p>When <i>Sept 13</i>, 1861.</p> <p>Where <i>Albion N.Y.</i></p> <p>Period <i>3</i> years.</p> <p>Remarks <i>Enrolled at West Union N.Y. Sept 7/61</i></p> <p><small>*This organization subsequently became Co H, 86 N. Y. Inf.</small></p> <p>Book mark:</p> <p>(356) <i>F. C. Jones</i> Copyist.</p>	<p><i>N</i> 86th N.Y.</p> <p><i>Emin M. White</i></p> <p><i>Pvt., Co. H., 86 Reg't N. Y. Infan</i></p> <p>Appears on</p> <p>Company Descriptive Book</p> <p>of the organization named above.</p> <p>DESCRIPTION</p> <p>Age <i>18</i> years; height <i>5</i> feet <i>6</i> inches.</p> <p>Complexion <i>Light</i></p> <p>Eyes <i>Gray</i>; hair <i>Dark</i></p> <p>Where born <i>Brooklyn N.Y.</i></p> <p>Occupation <i>Farmer</i></p> <p>ENLISTMENT.</p> <p>When <i>Sept 7</i>, 1861.</p> <p>Where <i>Brooklyn</i></p> <p>By whom <i>Wm. Tubero</i> term <i>3</i> yrs.</p> <p>Remarks <i>Discharged Sept 10/61</i></p> <p><i>April 29/62. Temporary</i></p> <p><i>Rec'd. Nov. in active</i></p> <p>(358g) <i>Wm. Arnold</i> Copyist.</p>
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Figure 4. Sgt. White's Company Muster-in Roll

Undeterred, he returned home and recuperated over the next year. At the age of 21 he enlisted again, this time in the 179th NY Volunteers, at West Union, NY, on 10 March 1864, under the name of Edward M. White. Before leaving for the front he married Miss Margaret F. Rye, on 30 March 1864, at Greenwood, NY. At the ceremony, Justice of the Peace A. H. Burrell served as officiant, with Margaret's sisters Addie P. Nye and Sarah Burrell present as witnesses. Although Army surgeons cleared him for duty, he endured bouts of remittent fever that sent him into the hospital for lengthy periods. However, Pvt. White was "present for duty" with the 179th NY Vols. during the periods 1 May – 30 Jun 1864, and 10 Feb – 8 Jun 1865. During that last period, his regiment participated in several major engagements, leading up to the end of the war. He received several very handsome bounty payments and eventually was promoted to the rank of Sergeant.

PRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

VOLUNTEER ENLISTMENT.

STATE OF New York TOWN OF West Union

I, Edward M. White born in Trousdaleburgh in the State of New York aged Twenty years, and by occupation a Farmer Do HEREBY ACKNOWLEDGE to have volunteered this Tenth day of March 1864 to serve as a Soldier in the Army of the United States of America, for the period of THREE YEARS, unless sooner discharged by proper authority: Do also agree to accept such bounty, pay, rations, and clothing, as are, or may be, established by law for volunteers. And I, Edward M. White, do solemnly swear, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the United States of America, and that I will serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies or opposers whomsoever; and that I will observe and obey the orders of the President of the United States, and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to the Rules and Articles of War.

Sworn and subscribed to, at Elmira this 10th day of March 1864 } Edward M. White
BEFORE Samuel H. Thompson
Capt. & Re. Ma. 7th Reg.

I CERTIFY, ON HONOR, That I have carefully examined the above-named Volunteer, agreeably to the General Regulations of the Army, and that, in my opinion, he is free from all bodily defects and mental infirmity, which would in any way disqualify him from performing the duties of a soldier.

West Chubbuck
EXAMINING SURGEON.

I CERTIFY, ON HONOR, That I have minutely inspected the Volunteer, Edw. White previously to his enlistment, and that he was entirely sober when enlisted; that, to the best of my judgment and belief, he is of lawful age; and that, in accepting him as duly qualified to perform the duties of an able-bodied soldier, I have strictly observed the Regulations which govern the recruiting service. This soldier has Blue eyes, Sandy hair, Fair complexion, is 5 feet 7 inches high.

Samuel H. Thompson
Capt. & Re. Ma.
Regiment of 27th N.Y. Volunteers,
RECRUITING OFFICER.

Mustered into the service of the United States, for three years or during the war, from date of enlistment, in Company 179th Regiment of N.Y. Volunteers, on the 11th day of March 1864 at Elmira, N.Y.

Samuel H. Thompson
Capt. & Re. Ma.
27th Reg. N.Y.

(A. G. O. No. 74 & 76.)

Figure 5. Sgt. White's 179th NY Vols. Enlistment Certificate

Sgt. Edward M. White's Service Summary and Comments

The following is a detailed account of Sgt. Edward M. White's Civil War service complied from various sources.

13 Sept 1861

Enlisted as Private Edwin M. White, Co. H, 86th NY Infantry.

14 Sept 1861 – Jan 1862

Present for duty.

(Comment: During this time Edward (a.k.a. Edwin) M. White (EMW) underwent training with his company and was transported to Virginia.)

Jan 1862

Changed camp in cold rain, from Camp Griffin, VA, to Camp Good Hope, MD.

27 Jan – 14 Feb 1862

Treated at Regimental Hospital for Catarrh.

Between 1-5 Mar 1862

Taken sick.

6-11 Mar 1862

Contracted Typhoid fever.

12 Mar 1862

Entered Seminary General Hospital, Georgetown, in Washington, DC. 1st Lt. Raymond, 86th NY, reports that EMW was “seriously ill”.

13 Mar -28 Apr 1862

Remained in Hospital.

29 Apr 1862

Discharged from Seminary General Hospital.

7 May 1862

Examined by an Army Surgeon and found unfit for duty.

10 May 1862

Received discharge from active military service.

(Comment: EMW’s service with the 86th NY was short-lived, and he returned home to Troupsburg, NY, after leaving the service. He was sick from 27 Jan until 29 Apr, 1862, a period of almost 3 months!)

10 Mar 1864

Reenlisted at West Union, NY, in Co. B, 179th NY Infantry.

(Comment: Less than two years later, at the age of 20, EMW reenlists, gets married, and heads off as a Pvt. in a new regiment, Co. B, 179th NY Vols. EMW receives a bounty for his enlistment.)

11 Mar 1864

Mustered in at Elmira, NY.

30 Mar 1864

Married Miss Margaret P. Nye in Greenwood, NY.

13 Apr – 3 May 1864

Reported on the muster and descriptive roll of a detachment of US vols. He received \$13.00 advance pay, \$25.00 advance bounty, and \$35.00 compensation.

(Comment: on 27 April, EMW leaves with Co B, 179th NY Vols., from Elmira, NY, for Washington, D.C., by way of New York and Philadelphia. On May 3, 1864, EMW arrives at Arlington Heights in Virginia, in the vicinity of Fort Runyon and Fort Albany.)

4 May and 30 Jun 1864

Present for duty.

(Comment: On 30 May he embarks with his regiment from Alexandria, VA, on the transport John Brooks, and arrives at White House Landing, VA, on the Pamunkey River, 3 Jun 1864. On 12 Jun 1864 the 179th receives its first hostile fire. On 16 Jun 1864 the 179th NY participates in the Army of the Potomac's change of front from Cold Harbor, VA, to Petersburg, VA. And on 17 Jun 1864 the 179th NY participates in the First Division's assault on the Confederate Hagood Line near Shand's Farm.)

Jul and Aug 1864

Reported on the Company Muster Roll as "absent and sick in hospital". EMW received \$13.00 one month advance pay, and \$60.00 advance bounty. He was due the 2nd and 3rd installments of \$80 bounty.

24 Jul 1864

Entered 1st Division 9th Army Corps Hospital, before Petersburg, VA, with "remittent fever".

(Comment: After a brief period of action EMW must have become extremely sick because he was transferred within two days to Washington, D.C., suffering from remittent fever. Remittent fever is defined as a recurring and low grade fever that often flares up.)

26 July 1864 – 20 Jan 1865

Reported on the hospital muster roll throughout the period. Spends Sept – Oct 1864 in tent number 10, and receives a furlough from 1 -17 Nov 1864.

(Comment: EMW misses his regiment's engagements during this entire period, and he receives a particularly long furlough, which was hard to obtain during the period. According to Dr. Francis Lord in his book, *They Fought for the Union*, extended furloughs were sometimes given to the sick. It could be assumed he returned home to Troupsburg, NY, for a short time. A copy of his furlough pass is included in his pension record.)

21 Jan – 9 Feb 1865

Sent to duty on 21 Jan 1865.

(Comment: During this period EMW must have been transported back to VA, and again reports for duty with the 179th NY Vols.)

10 Feb – 24 Apr 1865

Returned to seat of war for duty in Co. B, 179th NY Infantry, near Hancock Station, VA, and was present for duty during this entire period. Service records for Jan and Feb 1865 indicate EMW was due 4th installment of \$40.00 bounty, and pay as a Sergeant from 1 Jan 1865.

(Comment: EMW's location at Hancock Station is reported in a letter included in the pension record, written by a surgeon whom EMW claimed gave him medication for remittent fever. The surgeon didn't remember EMW's claim in the letter but indicates he had no reason not to believe the story to be true. The pension record also reports that the 179th NY Vols. was engaged in the assault, siege, and capture of Petersburg, VA, on 1 and 2 Apr 1865. This corresponds to the 179th NY attacks on the Confederate lines near Fort Mahone. Following the action, EMW moves into Petersburg and then on to Burkeville, VA, arriving there 8 April 1865. It is interesting that EMW receives a promotion to Sergeant after such long periods of illness. He must have performed well when fit, to merit the promotion.)

25 Apr – 7 Jun 1865

On 25 April he boarded the Prince Albert at City Point, VA, with his regiment, and arrived in Alexandria at 10 P.M. the next day. He went into camp on 27 April at Fort Lyn, just one mile west of Alexandria. He participated in the Grand Review 23 May 1865.

8 Jun 1865

Mustered out of the 179th NY Infantry near Alexandria, VA. The record shows EMW was advanced, for clothing in kind since enlistment, \$79.98. Bounty paid \$140. Bounty due \$160.

9 -21 Jun 1865

On 11 Jun the 179th arrived in Elmira at 4 A.M., and participated in Elmira's celebration on the 12th. On 21 Jun 1865 soldiers of the 179th were paid and departed for home.

Life after the War

Like many veterans, Edward White joined the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), S.A. Baley Post 351. The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) was a fraternal organization composed of veterans of the Union Army, US Navy, Marines and Revenue Cutter Service, who served in the American Civil War. Shown in Figure 6 is the only known picture of veteran "Edd" White who is standing in the back row, sixth from the left.



Figure 6. GAR S. A. Baley Post 351 Reunion Portrait

Shown in Figure 6 are: **Front Row:** left to right: John Minard, Witt Card, Billie Pierce, Perry Fisher, Reuben Stiles, Erv Austin, Tipp Hubbard, John Scott, Mr. Gregory, Jess Spencer, John Joe Marlatt, Julian Miller, Sam Tuttle. **Second Row:** Alva Cornish, Hank White, Captain Card, ? ?. Uriah Atwood, Henry Pierce, ??, Golio, R.D. Cummings, Ike Baker, Orland Robbins, Elizer Healey, ? ?, Henry Carpenter, Jasper Rogers (Jat). **Third Row:** Eli Springer, ??, ? Metcalf, Alf Williams, Royal Hall, Edd White, Charles Pickett, Edd Clarkson, George Holt, Ike Minard, Clarence Wilkinson, Harrison Steele, Hoke Hill, Sam Ackley, Edd Baker. Standing, Vet Bell, Commander of S. A. Baley Post 351. A close-up of Edd White is shown in Figure 7.



Figure 7. Magnification of Figure 6, Showing Edward ("Edd") M. White

Sgt. Edward M. White survived the war but his service-related illnesses would hinder his ability to farm, and plagued him for the rest of his life. According to his pension record, he became almost a complete

invalid, and he applied for an invalid pension around 1880 due to a multitude of illnesses and poor health. The record shows he received a pension of \$30/month. Between 1903 and 1916, his pension records are filled with correspondence requesting pension increases due to his deteriorating health and inability to work and, at times, even to dress himself. In addition to his wife, he now had two children to care for. Included in the pension records are numerous letters, medical reports, and correspondence related to the pension increase requests. Unfortunately his requests for an increase were denied.

Although the pension increase denials were unfortunate, the pension record information gave added detail about his military service. For example, on 15 May 1880 a former officer in the 86th NY, 1st Lt. Raymond, wrote a letter to support Edward White's pension request, stating:

... I knew Edward M. White at the time of his enlistment, long before and afterwards, that when he entered the service in the War of 1861 [I] knew Edward M. White to be a sound healthy man – that in the spring of 1862 about the 1st of March said Edward M. White was taken to Regimental Hospital on or about the 5th of March 1862 and the same day was sent to Seminary Hospital Georgetown D.C. where I saw him some time after and a number of times, do not remember the date of any visit, but do remember that Edward M. White was very dangerously ill that his head troubled him and his difficulty in the head was called Catarrh. White was a good faithful soldier of strict integrity and uprightness and I have every reason to believe and do believe that said Edward M. White has suffered very much from Catarrh contracted as aforesaid and is very much troubled and disabled from said disease at the present time.

In spite of his poor health, he remained married and raised his two children, one of which was adopted. He died on 26 October 1919 at the age of 76, and was buried at Mount Hope Cemetery, Troupsburg, NY. In 1920 his pension was transferred to his wife, Margaret. It is interesting that the pension record includes a copy of both his marriage certificate and his death certificate – allowing the location of the grave site to be found. Pictures of the gravesite are seen in Figures 8 and 9.



Figure 8. Entrance to Mt. Hope Cemetery, Troupsburg, NY



Figure 9. Civil War Veteran Edward M. White's Burial Place

Conclusion

Civil War historian Dr. Francis Lord, in his book *They Fought for the Union*, explains why personal military items such as canteens turn up from the descendants of family members. He says that under General Order No. 114, of 15 Jun 1865, soldiers who were honorably discharged were permitted to retain, without charge, their knapsacks, haversacks, and canteens. Edward M. White kept his bull's eye canteen and brought it home as a souvenir, even though formal approval doing so did not come until a week later. How ironic that tainted water from this canteen may have been the cause of his long term illnesses.

The churn of soldiers coming in and going out of the Union Army was constant throughout the war. The Union Army which took to the field at the beginning of the war was in many ways not the same Army that ended it. Sickness claimed the lives of many soldiers who served, more than those lost in battle. Even the life of the President's son was taken by Typhoid fever, allegedly from the tainted water in Washington, D.C. Edward W. White managed to survive both sickness and battle, but not without lasting consequences.

Sgt. White returned home in Jun 1865 to his wife Margaret in Troupsburg, NY, with a large sum of money in his pocket. He was never the same man. The effects of his service-related sicknesses would plague him for the rest of his life. He tried to work as a farmer when he could, but eventually he had to depend on his \$30/month veteran pension to care for his family. He remained in Troupsburg, NY, until his death.

– John Strott