

## Thomas Bradley at the Battle of Chancellorsville

### A Pictorial Historical Essay about a True American Hero

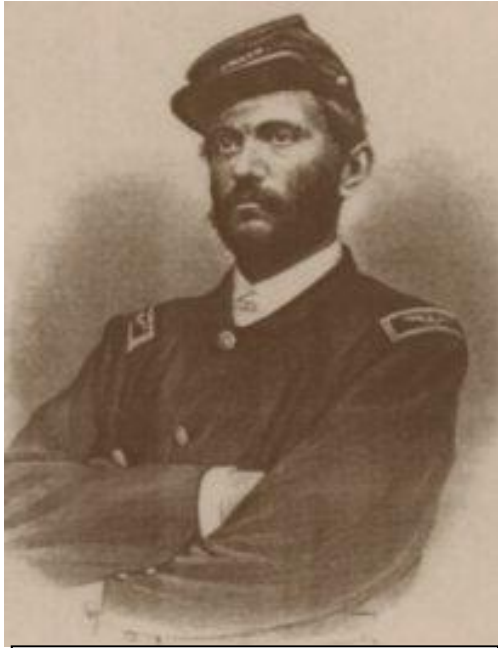


This is the story of Walden's Thomas W. Bradley who, during the Civil War and, at the age of eighteen years, volunteered for a very risky mission to get ammunition under heavy enemy fire to save his regiment from total destruction at the hands of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. For his actions, Thomas Bradley was awarded our nation's highest military award, the Congressional Medal of Honor. This award was well deserved and it typified Thomas Bradley's approach to duty and his sense of community service!



A Historical Essay by Joseph E. Devine

The Civil War began in 1861 and the Union suffered heavy losses in its early campaigns. Things looked grim for America. Much human life had been sacrificed to very little effect. The Union Army of the Potomac had seen little success and President Abraham Lincoln, in July of 1862, called for 300,000 volunteers to sign up for "the long haul"-- *three years* of service to help advance the cause of slavery abolition, and to protect the North, which was now in danger of invasion from the successful Confederacy. Volunteers from all over Orange County enlisted to save our nation and, by August of 1862, the 124<sup>th</sup> Regiment was fully enlisted under the command of Captain Augustus Van Horne Ellis in Goshen, NY. Colonel Van Horne Ellis was a lawyer and graduate of Columbia University. Ellis almost literally whipped the 124th into shape from the beginning. He was described as "cold, harsh and ambitious ... but every inch the soldier." He called his regiment "The American Guard," after the 71st Militia, which he previously commanded. The name of the regiment would later change, quite unintentionally.



**Augustus Van Horne Ellis**

The 124<sup>th</sup> Regiment was held in reserve during a major battle at Fredericksburg, Virginia in December of 1862. This was a major victory for the Confederacy and the armies on both sides moved to winter camps to recover.



**Chancellorsville House  
Depicted here during happier times**

The following year, at Chancellorsville House in Virginia, in early May 1863, the 124th Regiment entered its first battle. The regiment engaged in a bitter face-to-face firefight as the Army of the Potomac attempted to halt the advancing Confederates. Chancellorsville was not a town, but an intersection, near Spotsylvania, Virginia, where the Chancellor family lived. The house was constructed about 1816 and occasionally functioned as an Inn for travelers on the busy Orange Turnpike. The Chancellorsville engagement was one of the largest and most destructive battles of the war. More than 30,000 Americans lost their lives on both sides during this conflict. While the battle lasted nearly a week, the bloodiest day was Sunday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, when over 18,000 soldiers died, both Union and Confederate.

It was on this day that Thomas Bradley would volunteer, alone, to face heavy musket and cannon fire to retrieve ammunition that the 124<sup>th</sup> Regiment desperately needed. On the third day of battle on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, about mid-morning, Union General Joseph Hooker was standing on the porch of the Chancellor House when an incoming projectile struck a pillar, which broke and knocked the general out. He regained his senses, but was forced to retire to the rear. The situation for the Union forces was very serious and was considered especially bad for the 124<sup>th</sup> Regiment. The Confederates, although outnumbered, were able to inflict serious damage to the Union lines and disrupt the Union plan of attack.

Walden resident and Commander of Company H of the 124<sup>th</sup>, Captain John R. Hays, later wrote:



Illustration: Thomas Bradley, shedding his gear for the long run to get the ammunition.



Illustration: Thomas Bradley beginning the long run for the ammunition under very heavy fire.



Illustration: Thomas Bradley, returning with the heavy load of ammunition under heavy Confederate fire.

“The regiment supported a battery located west of the Chancellorsville House, south and at right angles with the plank road, and facing west toward Van Werts farm. It then moved north across the plank road and across the easterly branch of Lewis Run or creek, and in line of battle withstood a flanking assault of a portion of Iverson’s Brigade of the Confederate Army. The regiment here lost half its number, killed or wounded, and practically exhausted its ammunition before being recalled to a point on the level near Chancellorsville House, from which place it charged with the bayonet and

retook the position formerly occupied by the battery. Being out of ammunition, and the position being untenable, the regiment fell back under galling fire to just east of the Chancellorsville House, near a new line, to which our Division had been forced. The Confederate batteries were shelling the Chancellorsville House, and raking the plain and turnpike with grape and canister, making the spot a very warm one, and causing the men of our regiment to hug the ground closely. At this time, Colonel A. Van Horn Ellis, of our regiment, was conserved for want of ammunition, and, there being some boxes of it in sight, lashed to the backs of a group of dead mules, distant about five hundred yards to the right front, between the lines, he spoke of making a detail to go for it, but hesitated about doing so because of the hazardous undertaking. Then Thomas W. Bradley, aged eighteen years, a corporal in my command, volunteered for the special service, and divesting himself of his accoutrements, went out between the lines amid a heavy fire of shell, canister, and scattering rifle shots, across the plain, to where the ammunition boxes lay, and, in safety, returned with all the ammunition he could carry.”

Several other officers echoed these words about Thomas Bradley, by his commander Captain John Hays, as part of the nomination process for Thomas Bradley’s Congressional Medal of Honor.

Lieutenant Thomas Hart, of Company A, of the same regiment, also described the act of bravery, making this additional mention: "At the hottest part of the return, Bradley was seen to turn, and, facing the enemy's line, rapidly walk backward; being questioned later in regard to this, he replied, ' I felt sure of getting hit, and wanted the stroke in front instead of in my back.' "



Major-General Daniel E. Sickles, in a letter to Hon. Daniel S. Lamont, Secretary of War, dated New York, April 4, 1896, says: " The gallantry and ability of Captain Bradley were well known to me, and were highly appreciated by his commanding officer, the accomplished Colonel Ellis, who fell at the head of his regiment. The incident of the supply of ammunition obtained by Bradley in the face of a terrible fire from the enemy, the only man who volunteered to get it, was reported to me at the time. It seems to me that this is distinctly one of the signal acts of devotion, courage and heroism, contemplated in the Act of Congress, authorizing these medals of honor, and that Bradley is worthy, both as a soldier and a

citizen, to wear it."

Note that the heat of battle often causes administrative matters to be overlooked. It was not until the Year 1896 that the words identified above were written. It was that year, 33 years after Bradley's act of courage that he received the medal that he so rightly deserved.

#### **A 1902 Interview with Thomas Bradley by a NYC Newspaper Reporter.**



**Thomas Bradley in Civil War uniform.**

A few years after Thomas Bradley was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, a New York City newspaper reporter interviewed the man whose actions were finally recognized.

As told by the reporter: Having learned of a medal, which had been awarded to Colonel Thomas W. Bradley, for especial valor under the fire of the enemy, I went to Walden, N.Y., to see the gentleman and learn something about his brave act. I found him in the office of his large knife manufactory, situated on the bank of the beautiful Walkill River. He had his coat off, his sleeves rolled up, and a mechanic's apron on, and was as hard at work over his table as any day laborer could possibly be. I said to him: " Colonel, tell me something about that act of bravery for which you received a Congressional medal." He searched through a dozen pigeon-holes, until he found a bundle of papers, which he handed to me, saying, " I would rather let others talk about that act of mine, nearly forty years ago, than to do so myself." I took the papers, and copied from them a few facts, which I desired to record. The papers indicated that John R. Hayes said: Thomas W. Bradley enlisted in my Company as a private on August 12, 1862, at the age of only seventeen years. He was seriously wounded at Gettysburg, July 2, 1863; was severely wounded at the Wilderness, May 6, 1864, and again wounded in the right

hip at the battle of Boynton Road, near Petersburg, October 27, 1864."

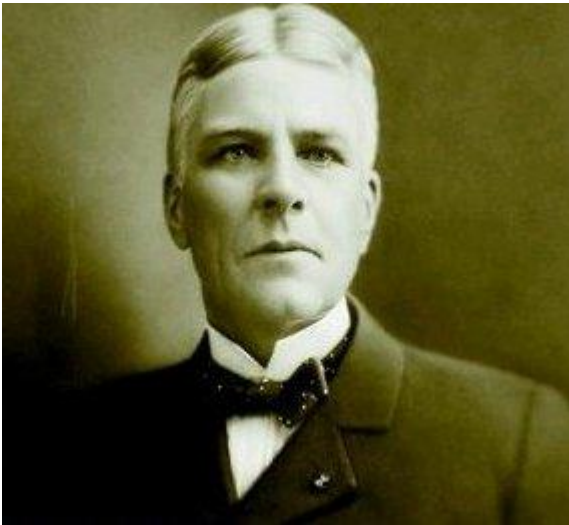
The reporter then read the citations of Captain John Hays, Lieutenant Thomas Hart and Major-General Daniel E. Sickles, identified earlier in this essay.

Turning to the colonel, the reporter said: " It is not necessary for you to mention with your lips what you have spoken so eloquently by your action, and while you have such faithful witnesses to speak in your honor."

I said, "Your regiment was the `Orange Blossoms,' was it not?" He said that is was. I remarked that it was a great honor to have been a soldier in that brave regiment. " How about those wounds?" I asked. " Do they hurt you any?" "Yes, some, but I count it a pleasure and honor to have received them in the defense of my country."

Getting the ammunition on that bloody field was a brave act, which deserved the Medal of Honor, but that bravery reached a sublime pitch of heroism when the boy of eighteen, expecting to be killed, turned his face to the enemy, unwilling to be shot in the back.

## The Red Badge of Courage



Thomas Bradley

*The Red Badge of Courage* is an 1895 war novel by American author Stephen Crane. It is considered one of the most influential works in American literature ever published. The novel, in which a young recruit in the American Civil War is faced by the cruelty of war, made Crane an international success. The book tells the story of the average soldier and his struggles with fear and heroism. In preparation for the writing of this book, Stephen Crane interviewed many former 124<sup>th</sup> Regiment soldiers in a small park in the Orange County City of Port Jervis, while visiting his brother who lived two city blocks away.

Stephen Crane heard many tales of heroism during those interviews and, we might assume, he also heard about the heroism of Thomas Bradley, whose actions were well noted among his fellow soldiers.

## Wallkill Valley Time Article about Thomas Bradley

The Spring 2006 Wallkill Valley Almanac, published by the Wallkill Valley Times, printed a wonderful story about Thomas Bradley and his role within the Walden community. This article tells the story of Bradley's role as the President of the knife factory and his contributions to the village that he loved. Thomas Bradley's benevolence to his beloved Walden is legendary. This is an inspiring story. You may download that article from the website identified below.

<http://home.roadrunner.com/~montghistory/>

The Village of Walden is a wonderful community, rich in the contributions that have come from its fine citizens, from the early days to the present time. There are many wonderful stories about Walden, from the volunteerism of its Fire Departments to the current youth, senior and library activities that are truly impressive.

Community service is a cherished resource. The Wallkill Valley Times article, mentioned here, is a great source that documents the contributions of Thomas Bradley to his beloved village. The Walden public library still retains the names of Bradley's wife, Josephine, and his daughter, Louise.

## Thanks for the help

Many thanks to Charles LaRocca and the current members of the 124<sup>th</sup> NYS Volunteers who staged a special reenactment of Thomas Bradley's 'Run for the Ammo' during the Fall of 2008. The images of Bradley going for the ammo, earlier in this essay, came from that reenactment. There are wonderful websites that are rich in information about the 124<sup>th</sup> Regiment, the Orange Blossoms. The links to two such sites is provided here.

<http://www.124thnysv.com/events.htm> 124th Regiment website, contains a page for several links to other sites and also news and events information.

[http://www.skaneateles.org/124\\_inf/124\\_inf.html](http://www.skaneateles.org/124_inf/124_inf.html) 124th Regiment website

The current 124<sup>th</sup> Regiment New York State Volunteers (Orange Blossoms) meet and perform very realistic reenactments of Civil War battles at the Orange County Farmers Museum on Route 17K in the Town of Montgomery. The 124<sup>th</sup> Volunteers also camp in realistic settings that mirror the type of soldier camps that existed during the Civil War. These events are entertaining and educational. If you are interested in learning more about Civil War life, these are fine events to mark on your calendar.

## Epilogue (Afterword)



**Soldiers of the 124<sup>th</sup> Orange Blossoms Regiment are shown here during a reunion at Gettysburg in the Year**

Thomas Wilson Bradley was born in Yorkshire, England, April 6, 1844. He immigrated to the United States in 1846 with his parents, who settled in Walden, N.Y. Bradley attended school and also worked for his father at the Walden Knife Factory. During the Civil War, he entered the Union Army as a private; promoted to corporal, sergeant and captain in the 124<sup>th</sup> Regiment, New York Volunteer Infantry; and he was aide-de-camp to Major General Mott, Third Division, Second Army Corps. Bradley was brevetted major of United States Volunteers; He was elected to the State House of Assembly in 1876; he became a delegate to the Republican National Conventions in 1892, 1896, and 1900 and was elected as a Republican to the Fifty-eighth and to the four succeeding Congresses (March 4, 1903-March 3, 1913). Due to the

passing of his wife and daughter, Thomas Bradley was not a candidate for renomination in 1912. He engaged in banking and was first Vice President of the Walden Savings Bank; president and treasurer of the New York Knife Co. Thomas Bradley died in Walden, N.Y. on Memorial Day, May 30, 1920; interment in Walkkill Valley Cemetery.

## How the Orange Blossoms Were Named

During the Battle of Chancellorsville, in urging his men forward, Colonel Ellis shouted, "Hie!! Hie! My Orange Blossoms!" and thereafter the men became known as the "Orange Blossoms." At some point the officers and men of the regiment began wearing strips of orange ribbons in their buttonholes to mark themselves, a practice they seem to have followed throughout the war. Together with their III Corps badges, retained after the corps was disbanded and they were transferred to the II Corps, the orange ribbon was a part of their regimental "uniform." Because of the heavy casualties at Chancellorsville, the 124th only numbered 18 officers and 220 men when it went into action against a full Confederate division on July 2 at Gettysburg. When



the 24<sup>th</sup> was attacked, Ellis and his field officers remained mounted on atop their horses. An officer in the regiment protested, but Ellis simply replied, "The men must see us today." This phrase gave title to a painting by Civil War artist Don Trioani that depicts Ellis and the 124th at Gettysburg. By all accounts, Ellis was brave and cool during the fighting. He remained in the saddle, sword drawn, urging his men to stand firm amongst the extreme chaos and smoke of the fighting. At the height of the fighting, a bullet slammed into Ellis's forehead. He pitched dead off his horse. On this same day, Thomas Bradley was seriously wounded. After the war, the citizens of Orange County raised money to erect a monument to the 124th Regiment at Gettysburg. Dedicated on July 2, 1884, it was the first regimental New York monument placed on the field. The monument has a life-sized statue of Colonel Ellis, standing with his arms folded gazing calmly ahead. It is the only official full-sized statue of a Union regimental commander at Gettysburg.

**124<sup>th</sup> Regiment Monument at Gettysburg**

**The Standard Bearer Monument, in Goshen, New York**

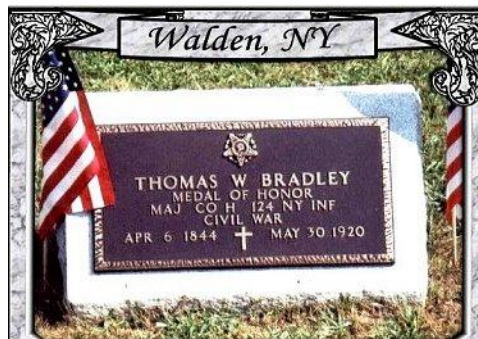


This statue was erected by Medal of Honor winner Thomas W. Bradley of the 124th New York State Volunteers to honor the memory of the soldiers of the 124<sup>th</sup>.

The Monument was dedicated by Col. Charles H. Weygant on Sept. 5, 1907. The statue underwent extensive restoration and was rededicated on Sept. 7, 2007.

In the image, members of the current 124<sup>th</sup> NYSV stand during the monument rededication ceremony in 2007.

**The Standard Bearer Monument in Goshen**



**Thomas Bradley's grave at Walkkill Valley Cemetery, Walden, NY**



On April 9, 1865 after four years of Civil War, approximately 630,000 deaths and over 1 million casualties, General Robert E. Lee surrendered the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia to Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, at the home of Wilmer and Virginia McLean in the town of Appomattox Court House, Virginia. The 124<sup>th</sup> Regiment participated in the battle that preceded the Confederate surrender and the regiment remained on the field as Generals Lee and Grant met to end the war.

The Orange Blossoms would return to Orange County for dismissal.

### Lee and Grant at Appomattox Court House, VA

The Chancellorsville House building burned during the battle on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1863. The family rebuilt the house, but it burned in 1927. Archaeologists found and marked the outline of the original house. During the fighting on the morning of May 3 that raged around the Chancellor House, the dwelling caught fire. Union soldiers rescued the family that had taken cover in the cellar. The house was badly damaged.

The favorite artillery piece in both the Union and the Confederacy was the Napoleon, a smoothbore, muzzle-



loading, 12-pounder "gun-howitzer." Developed under the auspices of Louis Napoleon of France, it first appeared in the American artillery in 1857. Relatively light and portable, the Napoleon was used as both an offensive and defensive weapon by both armies. Initially made of bronze, Napoleons were cast from iron when the South ran short of the other metal. Its maximum effective range was about 1700 yards, but it was most effective at about 250 yards or less. Firing small shot (canister) and the slightly larger grape shot, the Napoleon probably inflicted more casualties than all other artillery pieces combined. Both canister and grape shot were scattershot projectiles consisting of small iron balls encased in a container. Canister projectiles came packed in a tin can while grape shot was usually wrapped in a cloth or canvas covering and tied with string, which made it look like a bunch of grapes. When fired, the can or wrapping disintegrated, releasing the shot in a spray.

In effect, then, a gun loaded with grape shot or canister acted like a large, sawed-off shotgun; it was particularly lethal when fired at a range of 250 yards or less. Grape was less often used by the field artilleries of the day, as it was more effective to fire the smaller and more numerous canister balls at an advancing enemy.

Accoutrement: This term is used to define the equipment that every soldier carried during the Civil War. Soldiers were responsible for their own water, personal belongings (like dry socks) and the essentials of hygiene like soap and shaving equipment.

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