

## Origin of the "Averill Rifle" Nickname

It was not unusual for Civil War units to already have or to assume some nickname that was used to identify that particular unit. It might be related to who had recruited them, who their leader was or the area of the state they hailed from. In some cases, the nickname carried through for the entire war. In others, it was forgotten as time went on. In the case of Company A, they assumed the nickname "Averill's Rifles" just before they left Hartford for the war.

Roger Averill was a staunch supporter of the war and had helped recruit many of the early regiments including what would become the 11<sup>th</sup> Regiment. He was a prominent Danbury resident, having served in the state assembly and as a judge for many years. He would be elected Lt. Governor in 1862 and serve in that post until 1866. He personally knew many of the men of Company A. To show their appreciation for his efforts and to honor their town, the company voted to name themselves "Averill's Rifles".

First mention of this was discovered in the book *The History of Danbury 1684-1896* published in 1896. There is mention of the name in correspondence and articles in 1862 but so far, no mention is found after early 1863. Perhaps this was because many of the Danbury members had left the company by early 1863 due to disease and injury. We'll update these pages if new information is found. Below is the original excerpt from the Danbury book.

*Excerpt from The History of Danbury 1684-1896:*

The company went into camp in Hartford. On October 8th, at a meeting of the company, they unanimously adopted the name of "Averill Rifles," in honor of Hon. Roger Averill, of Danbury. Mr. Averill highly appreciated the compliment, and on Thanksgiving Day, November 28th, he presented the company with an elegant flag. There were from twenty-five to thirty of the company present, under command of Captain Southmayd. Concert Hall, where the affair was held, was packed with citizens. The company marched, headed by martial music, to the stage, where they were received by Mr. Averill. Mr. L. S. Barnum stated the object of the meeting, and then Mr. Averill addressed the Rifles. He welcomed them home on this day peculiarly interesting to New Englanders. It was gratifying to him to say, both from published statements and from personal observation in camp, that the Rifles had earned the respect and confidence reposed in them, and a rank among the most efficient and best-drilled companies that had gone into camp in the State. The speaker acknowledged the honor conferred upon him by the company in selecting a name, and as a slight token of his appreciation of the compliment he had procured the colors. Turning to Captain Southmayd he handed them to him, and then again addressing the company he charged them to guard it with zealous care. "If, in the battle, the standard-bearer should be shot down, let another brave man take it up, and with its folds waving over the heads of the company, lead them on to victory. And should it be torn to ribbons, preserve as many of the shreds as possible, bring them back, and when you come we will give you such a welcome as never greeted you before."

Captain Southmayd being unable to speak a loud word by reason of a cold, Mr. L. S. Barnum responded for the company. He spoke in a very complimentary strain of the Rifles, for he had been two weeks in camp and knew what he had seen. The colors were taken in charge by Color

Sergeant Irving Stevens. They were made of heavy silk, of regulation size, six feet by six feet eight inches, embroidered with heavy bullion gold fringe, and surmounted with two heavy gold tassels. On the top of the staff was a gold eagle with outstretched wings. The flag went with the company through the war, and was brought home with them. Lieutenant Peter W. Ambler was appointed custodian of the flag.

Among the members of the company was Mr. Grandison D. Foote. Mr. Foote was in the first company of three months' men, and after returning he went back to his trade of hatter hi the Pahquioque Factory. The departure of the Averill Eifles was too much for him, and throwing down the implements of his trade he enlisted in the same company. They had already gone to Hartford, and there Mr. Foote joined them. On the afternoon of his departure his fellow-workmen gathered together, and Mr. William Mansfield, in behalf of the men, presented Mr. Foote with a Bible with \$20 in bills between the leaves. The Bible had embossed on the cover his name, company, and regiment. Mr. Foote responded, and then left for the cars. As the train passed the shop the whole force turned out, and he went by amid the cheers of the crowd.

The Eleventh Regiment, of which Captain Southmayd's company was a part, left Hartford on December 17th, and arrived in New York on the same day. They were received by the Sons of Connecticut, an organization composed of those residents of that city who were originally from this State, and were escorted to the barracks at City Hall Park, where the men were sumptuously fed. The officers were entertained at the Astor House.