

## **COLONEL RICHARD E. HOLCOMB - MARTINET OR MARTYR?**

**An imposing monument in the Center Cemetery in  
Granby, Connecticut is inscribed:**

**COL. RICHARD E. HOLCOMB  
LIEUT. 3RD REGT. CONN. VOLS.  
MAJOR 13TH REGT. CONN. VOLS.  
COL. 1ST LOUISIANA VOLS.  
BREVETTED BRIGADIER GENERAL  
BORN SEPT. 28, 1824  
FELL AT THE HEAD OF HIS  
BRIGADE IN AN ATTACK ON  
PORT HUDSON, LA. WHILE  
GALLANTLY LEADING HIS  
MEN TO THE ASSAULT  
JUNE 14, 1863  
HIS LAST WORDS  
“CHARGE FORWARD, DOUBLE QUICK”**



**It describes a heroic death in the Civil War, and yet, after the soldiers came home to Granby, there were persistent rumors that Holcomb was killed by his own troops, shot in the back. These rumors echoed faintly even into the mid-twentieth century.**

**Who was Richard E. Holcomb? What manner of man was he to inspire such contradictory testimony?**

**Richard Erskine Holcomb, born September 28, 1824, was the sixth and youngest child of Thomas and Clarinda Pettibone Holcomb. As a child, he lived in the Turkey Hills (East Granby) section of Granby, Connecticut, in the big family home on Hartford Avenue.**

**Holcomb was educated in local schools, including a private Academy. He was self-educated technically, and learned surveying and engineering. He was a linguist, fluent in French and Spanish. His life was adventurous and he traveled extensively in his work. While in South America, he did some exploring and had several articles published in *Harper's Magazine*.**

**For nearly ten years (1845-1855), Holcomb worked on the Isthmus of Panama, drawing maps, planning grades, and building bridges for the Panama Railroad. With his brothers, Franklin Porteous and Henry Lyman, he built the bridge across the Savannah River at Savannah, Georgia, using slave labor. He also worked on several southern railroads.**

A few letters written by Holcomb prior to the Civil War survive, and they reveal an intelligent, hard-working, ambitious, practical, worldly, sensitive, exacting, and occasionally playful young man.

On New Year's Day 1853, he wrote to his mother from Aspinwall, Panama. Aspinwall (now Colon) was the Atlantic Ocean terminus of the Panama Railroad.

*I received yours of Dec 5th by the last steamer. Dec the fifth was the birthday of my dear brother Thomas. What would I not have given that he might have been living to enjoy it, but we can only lament his sad fate and cherish his memory. To me he was more than a brother, "to all in need a friend."*

The brother he was mourning, Thomas G. Holcomb, born in 1805, had held many offices of trust. He was elected to the Connecticut House of Representatives four times, to the Senate in 1847, and was a Judge of Probate Court. "It cannot be said that he ever made or had an enemy." Yet this man committed suicide by hanging himself in a barn in 1852, at the age of 47. His only child, Thomas G. Holcomb Jr., was born eight months after his death, to Widow Charlotte Hoskins Holcomb. Charlotte is mentioned in some of the letters.

Richard also wrote his mother of an unusually wet season, and consequently, many sick with yellow fever. He made plans for a summer at home and mentioned his future wife, Hattie, in a decidedly unromantic passage.

*With reference to Miss H., I will write her soon, though I am not as you suppose so entirely absorbed in the matter that I think of nothing else.*

In the summer of 1853, Richard, 28, married Harriet Jencks Thompson, 26, daughter of Chloe Phelps and Seth Thompson of Thompsonville, (Enfield) Connecticut. By September, he was on his way back to Aspinwall with 70 men to work on the railroad, leaving his pregnant bride with her parents.

He wrote Hattie from Norfolk, Virginia, and described a harrowing and near-fatal steamer voyage. The *Georgia* left New York and soon encountered a gale so fierce the steamer made no headway. Then the engines stopped and they were "completely at the mercy of the wind and waves." The ship was leaking badly and the pumps were inoperable. "By morning there was seven feet of water in the vessel." The passengers and crew made a superhuman effort when the storm abated and "we succeeded in bailing the water out." They had to cut the inside out of the vessel to provide fuel for the engines and thus limped to the nearest port.

In December 1853, Richard was on the island of St. Thomas, which then belonged to Denmark. He was trying to get vessels to go after timber. He used the word "esconsned" (ensconced) and ordered Hattie to "Look up this word in the dictionary and correct me if I

*have not used it right.*” Another time he wrote “*campaign, (have I spelt it right?) I like correct spelling.*” His values were well defined.

Holcomb also told Harriet about an incident he considered insulting.

*Do you know that two men at different times yesterday insisted upon it that I was not an American and had the impudence to ask me - and why you will ask - because they said I had such small feet! I did not take it as a compliment, as a good large hand and foot father says is an evidence of an honest man.*

These letters from the newlywed Richard are the closest to “love letters” in any he wrote.

*Your ingenious womans heart is overflowing with love - and my sweet wife - I will try to give you my whole heart, my thoughts and let my existence be centered in you. Oh! could I but get on board the steamer which leaves here for New York tomorrow. I must not think of it as it makes me miserable.*

Holcomb made an oblique reference to the coming baby in this paragraph. “*About the middle of February I will take passage for home sweet home made doubly dear by the presence of a guardian angel - to say nothing of a little cherub.*”

While musing about the New England winter, Richard insisted, “*Remember that I will have a fireplace in the library.*” He added slyly, “*How inviting a warm feather bed and how charming. But this too leads to thinking of the desolate life I am leading.*” And he closed his letter with a promise to “*go no more a-roving.*”

In another letter from St. Thomas, written in January 1854, Harriet got a glimpse of her husband’s expectations. He suggested she learn how to cook from his mother, and assured Hattie that “*though her husband is somewhat fastidious,*” he would find no fault with her housekeeping skills. Holcomb also noted that this was his ninth Christmas away from home, and postponed his return until April, when the baby was due.

In a postscript he wrote, “*I have a very pretty Christmas present for you. I wish you a happy New Year. Ricardo*”

Clara Pettibone Holcomb was born April 13, 1854, at her grandparents’ home in Thompsonville. Despite her father’s vow to stop “roving,” Richard was on his way back to Panama by the end of 1854. “*I must make some sacrifices in living away from my family.*” He also made another promise to Harriet. “*I am going to have a house for us to live in.*”

Shortly after Clara’s birth, Richard’s father, Thomas Holcomb, had given him the family farm on Hartford Avenue for “love and goodwill.” It consisted of 94 acres with all

buildings. An 1855 map shows two houses on the property - one belonging to T. Holcomb, and one just to the west (103-105 Hartford Avenue) labeled Richard E. Holcomb. Thomas may have transferred the property in an effort to keep Richard home, but it was not successful.

In January 1855, Holcomb wrote that the Panama Railroad would open in two weeks with a “*grand jollification*” and that he was thinking of moving his family to the American West. In mid February he planned to go to New Orleans and St. Louis to look for railroad contracts.

Another daughter, Harriet Thompson Holcomb, was born January 9, 1857, and a month later, the wandering Richard was in Doctor Town, Georgia, working on the Savannah bridge and planning a trip to Florida before coming home in May. Meanwhile, Hattie and the children remained in Enfield with her parents. Holcomb also traveled to Beloit, Wisconsin, on business, before returning to Granby.

By 1858, Richard moved his family into the house his father had given him, and settled down to farming. Thomas, now retired, lived with him.

Little Harriet died in November 1858, before she was two years old, and a month later another girl, Mary Barber Holcomb was born, just four days before Christmas. Finally, a son was born in February 1861; he was named Richard Erskine Holcomb Jr., but called Franky. The little family was complete, but they only stayed together until the guns roared at Fort Sumter.

Richard E. Holcomb enlisted early in the war for three months (May-August 1861), serving as Quartermaster, and then Lieutenant, in the 3rd Regiment of Connecticut Volunteers. He was 36 years old. He kept re-enlisting and quickly rose in rank. Facts provide a background for this man, but his character is revealed in the letters he wrote during the war years.

Holcomb was a complex and intriguing man. He was ambitious, a realist, patriotic, and a strong advocate of duty. He was a stern disciplinarian, unyielding and authoritarian. His letters to his wife were stilted and awkward when expressing love. He frequently admonished Harriet for her neglect of him, and wielded guilt as a weapon; then he magnanimously forgave her, and tempered his scolding with compliments. But he loved his wife, and was finally able to express the depth of his feelings in his last group of letters.

The letters to his children were gentle and loving, almost poetic at times. He was surrounded by death and destruction, and the terrible reality of war inevitably pervaded every letter.

The early letters from Holcomb described Washington, D.C. preparing for war. A feeling of confidence in a quick victory was evident in his writing. There was time to attend presidential levees and receptions.

*I thought you would have made as good a President's wife as Mrs. Lincoln. She looks much younger than I supposed, she is quite short. I attended a reception at Mr. Seward's, the women were horribly ugly.*

His letters scolded Harriet for cleaning house instead of writing to him, especially since Franky was ill when he left home.

*The contrast between you and the wives of other officers is too marked for me not to take note of it. If anything should happen to me, would it not be a source of gratification to you in after days to think that the bond of affection had remained unbroken . . . in place of a want of affection, I shall call it culpable negligence.*

Holcomb also wrote about army red tape and his ambition to succeed.

*The circumlocution office is in full operation here. To get the least thing you have got to get half a dozen signatures to a requisition. If I only had military experience, I could reach the head of the regiment without trouble.*

He shared the prevailing optimistic mood expecting a swift end to the rebellion.

*I don't think we shall have a fight with the secessionists until we chase them up and catch them and they can't get out of the way. It is thought that they will make a stand at Manassas Junction about thirty miles from here.*

The battle that Holcomb viewed so confidently became history on July 21, 1861, when the two armies clashed at a stream called Bull Run, near Manassas Junction. Politicians and their ladies came from Washington to watch the Rebels chased back to Richmond. Instead, the Northern attack became a retreat, the retreat became a rout, and the rout became a race for Washington.

*The secessionists followed us up pretty close and had they come on in force they could have taken the city of Washington. I am satisfied with the part I took. I was in the hottest of the fight, shot a secessionist, and was about the last man to leave the field.*

Holcomb found the battlefield experience exciting and was not ready to be mustered out after just one taste of war. He re-enlisted as a Major in the 13th Regiment. He was on Sheep (actually Ship) Island in Mississippi in 1862, and wrote tender letters to his children.

*I send each of you a little shell wrapped up in this paper. I want each of you to have a little flower garden this summer. God made the pretty flowers for man's enjoyment, they are the footprints of the Creator. And you too, my little pets, are little flowers growing in Nature's great garden.*

He wrote about the antics of the Colonel's dog, and described the island in great detail - the flowers, birds, fish, and wildlife. He tried to write on their level, but could not long escape from thoughts of war and death.

*I hear the big guns, cannon at Fort Jackson. Numbers have lost their lives this morning while I have been writing you. The war may cost you, my dear children, a father.*

Holcomb faced his own mortality and put his affairs in order. His letters frequently mentioned the possibility of his death. He expressed faith in his wife's ability to raise the children properly if he was killed, although he usually told her exactly what to do.

Men fight wars for many reasons. Holcomb's passionate philosophy of freedom, liberty, justice, and sacrifice was clearly proclaimed in a powerful letter to children much too young to understand what he wrote.

*We are contending for great principles upon which the future well-being of millions are depending. He who is not willing to die for the benefit of the human race is not fit to live. Our forefathers freely offered up their lives upon the altar of liberty, and we their children have the sacred trust of protecting the government which they established.....or we are not worthy to be called their sons.*

*There is more depending upon the result of this contest than is generally thought to be. It is not only our own government, without which there is no security for life, liberty, or property, but the very principle of civil liberty itself, the right of man to govern himself is involved. Strong in the justice of our cause we must conquer.*

The 13th Connecticut Volunteers were sent to police New Orleans. Holcomb wrote to eight-year-old Clara, imparting moral lessons along with his affection. His attitude toward Sunday was ambivalent, and illuminated another facet of his character. Although proper respect for Sunday was advocated, he obviously appreciated the sensual aspects of Nature.

*I wish I could be there to take a walk with you tomorrow in the fields; you on one side and Mary on the other. I would have you respect the Sabbath, but not look upon it with awe and dread. You should do nothing wrong, but laugh and sing, walk into the fields and admire the works of Nature, seek to gratify the senses that God has given you; seek health and happiness.*

His fierce patriotism and anger at those avoiding the war blazed in this letter, even though he realized that Clara was too young to understand.

*It makes my heart bleed to see so many fine young men dying by disease and the hand of the enemy, while the cowards and dolts stay at home in inglorious ease. The man who will not take up arms to defend our mother country is worse than a parricide. Never look upon such, ever, except with contempt. You do not understand this what I am saying now, but you must keep this letter and read it when you get older.*

By late summer 1862, Colonel Holcomb was given the command of the 1st Louisiana Volunteers. With no previous military experience, only ambition, he became a commanding officer. He taught himself to be a soldier through books. He wrote to his father:

*I have a fine body of men physically, but a pretty hard set to manage. One company is made up altogether of jailbirds. I have only been here three weeks, and have organized and drilled a regiment and shall be ready to take the field tomorrow. I don't know if they will fight.*

There must have been some discipline problems, because a banker friend in Hartford wrote this to Holcomb:

*We read an account of your trouble with the disorderly men of your regiment, and your course though severe, so far as I know, is fully sustained by everybody. I hope you will not have to resort to your pistol or lash anymore.*

In the midst of war, a fond father found time to write a poem to his three young children, on the back of a memorial print honoring General Williams.

*To Clara, Mary & Franky  
Miss Clara P., how do you do  
I am quite well & I hope so are you.  
And little Mary, how are you today,  
With your eyes so bright, and so full of play.  
And Franky too, my brave soldier boy,  
May you all be blest with health & with joy.  
Your Papa*

*The picture on the other side of the paper is a picture of a brave soldier who was killed by the wicked rebels. He had little children, and it was a hard thing for him to die and leave them. I hope his will not be my fate, but that I may return home to embrace you.*

In another letter to young Clara, "Papa" included humorous stories of camp life, along with his ever present moral teachings. He was pleased to hear of her recent visit with cousins in Brooklyn. "People who stay at home all the while, get stupid, selfish and bigoted."

He described the great swamp near his tent, and the creepy crawling animals in it. One of the soldiers gave him a captured owl, kept in a corner of his tent, *“looking as wise and sober as a judge. I named him Horace Greeley.”*

The troops were moved upriver from New Orleans in October 1862, and Holcomb wrote his father that a new brigade under General Godfrey Weitzel had been formed for a purpose - an attack was imminent. Holcomb gloried in the responsibility of command, and had confidence in his ability and competence.

*Though my commission is hardly three months old, I am at present the ranking Col. of the brigade. It is likely that I shall be the second in command of the expedition, and if anything happens to the Genl., the command will devolve upon me. I would not like anything to happen to our Genl. but I should like a chance to try my hand at handling a big force.*

Colonel Holcomb uncomplainingly accepted responsibility and carried out his orders with diligence and alacrity. He performed well under pressure and he liked power. He wrote Harriet that he was unable to get a furlough for Christmas because he had no field officers.

He had a tremendous workload; besides regular duties, he was using his engineering expertise to build a fort. *“They either have great confidence in me, or intend to work me to death.”*

Another problem with this camp in the swamp was malaria, which was decimating the troops. Quinine was like gold in Louisiana, as indicated in his postscript.

*Today one of my pickets captured two men passing through our lines, with 500 ounces of quinine, worth \$2500. He offered the guard \$100 to let him off, but he would not do it. I shall promote him.*

Early in 1863, Holcomb asked his wife to visit him in Louisiana. Although he said the decision was Harriet's, he couldn't resist telling her exactly what to do, including how to write a letter. Avoiding a reply, Harriet asked him to resign his commission and come home.

*I would disgrace myself forever. The three years or the war men (enlistments for three years or the duration of the war) don't resign in the face of the enemy.*

In this letter, Holcomb decided that his wife would travel to New Orleans to visit him and bring all the children. He proudly told her he had completed Fort Butler *“for less than \$500 actual cost to the U.S.”*



Harriet Holcomb and her three young children traveled from New York to New Orleans on Government Transport in March 1863. Meanwhile, her husband's command had moved up the river with Admiral Farragut's fleet.

In letter after frustrated letter, Richard tried to get a furlough to visit his family, but failed. Evidently he was not a "favorite" who was able to curry special privileges from his superior officers. A dog was sent to young Franky from Farragut's Flag Ship. He took it north with him when the family sadly went home in May, without ever seeing their father and husband.

The last letter from Holcomb to his wife was undated. He had been wounded in the leg early during the siege of Port Hudson, but was back in command. He wrote a stirring and vivid description of an attempted assault in this letter. A thunderstorm added "*heavens artillery*" to the violent din of the battle. More than any other letter he wrote, this one revealed the reality of a siege and the untenable position of his troops.

*We have been lying in front of the enemys defenses for the last twenty days without making much progress. The enemy is in their rifle pits, in between us is a deep ravine, and we are behind a temporary brest work. We don't mind the musket balls so much, but when "Lady Davis" as the boys call it, throws ten inch shells into camp and they burst over head, it is not so pleasant.*

(He then described the assault.) *It was a sublime spectacle. About midnight our forces commenced to advance under the cover of our batteries which kept up a cannonade for an hour that made the earth fairly tremble. Just in my front are seven cannon and four mortars, which kept up a continual roar. Then at one a.m., the infantry advanced and there was a continual discharge of musketry till three, scurrying backward and forward, sometimes our men driving the rebels, and then they driving us.*

*Then a thunder storm came up and the flashes of lightning, the roar of the cannon and the discharge of musketry blended together with heavens artillery booming louder than all, made it one of the grandest sights I ever witnessed.*

*We lost some men in this assault, about one hundred, and did not accomplish anything.*

He did not feel that Port Hudson would surrender, and they would have to attack, "we can't afford to stay here in front of the enemy works much longer."

*Whatever may befall me my dear girl, in the coming fight, I shall go into it with the kindest feelings of affection for you and greatest confidence in your ability to bring up our dear children so as to make them useful members of society.*

*I hope to come out of it unharmed, but men are falling on every side, and I had a miraculous escape before. My watch and ring I shall hand today to Doc Messerve of this regt. I would give a good deal to see you and the children and I hope that Providence so wills it that I may have the pleasure to embrace you all before long. Kiss the dear children for me.*

Every other letter written to Harriet was signed rather formally "*Affectionately yours, R. E. Holcomb.*" This is the only letter that was signed "*Affectionately yours, Richard.*"

On the 14th of June 1863, Richard E. Holcomb was killed in action. Were the rumors true? Was Holcomb a victim of his own men? Obviously a definitive answer is impossible, but a reasonable response is yes.

If Colonel Holcomb had been commanding a Connecticut regiment, it might have been a different story. He was strict and demanding, but he was fair, and demanded as much of himself.

He was given a Louisiana command consisting of a motley assortment of repatriated Confederate soldiers, convicts, and foreigners - none of whom had any loyalty to or love for the North.

When the attack on Port Hudson was mounted, he did not command from behind the lines. He led his men into the precipitous ravines in front of the enemy defenses.

According to a history by Croffut and Morris: "Across this ground dashed the first line of battle, in which was a brigade led by Col. Richard E. Holcomb of the 1st Louisiana. The rebels madly plied the advancing regiments with shot and shell; with all missiles known to war, and unknown - flat irons, spikes, hatchets, ramrods, and pig iron."

"The first attacking party had recoiled; and as the 13th Conn. leaped from the ditch, they caught a glimpse of Col. Holcomb, their old Major, and gave him three hearty cheers. He was haranguing his brigade and trying to rally them; but they responded doubtfully; and he turned to the 13th, commanded by a captain, and offered to lead it. Another rousing cheer accepted the offer and they leaped to the front. The brave Holcomb was slain with a musket-ball in his head at the first onset."

Or is it possible that in the confusion of the battle, one of the reluctant Louisiana soldiers murdered Colonel Richard E. Holcomb?

## EPILOGUE

Richard and Harriet Holcomb had been married only ten years, and probably spent less than four entire years together. After the war, the widowed Harriet continued to live on the family farm on Hartford Avenue. She received a U.S. pension of \$30 a month, and aid

for her three fatherless children, until they reached the age of sixteen. Her widowed sister-in-law, Charlotte Hoskins Holcomb, lived with her. Harriet died in 1883, age 56.

Holcomb's aged father, Thomas died November 10, 1865, at the age of 86, having outlived four of his five sons.

Of Holcomb's three children, Clara Pettibone Holcomb (1854-1924) married Reverend William Lusk, and they had one child, Harriet. Mary Barber Holcomb (1858-1951) married Dr. Frank Newton Loomis, son of Granby store keeper James Newton Loomis. They lived in Derby, Connecticut, and had three children; Donald, who died at two years, Franklin, and Catharine. Richard Erskine Holcomb Jr. or Franky (1861-1927), a lumberman, married Emily A. Bradley, and they had a daughter Helen, and three sons, Richard Erskine III, Robert, and Herbert.

The men of the 13th Connecticut Volunteers highly regarded their former Major. A clipping from the 1863 newspaper *Connecticut War Record* states, "The transfer of its Major (now Colonel) Richard E. Holcomb was a severe blow to the regiment. Colonel Holcomb was its life and soul - his splendid courage, manly bearing, great experience in dealing with men, superior qualities as a disciplinarian, and indefatigable zeal in the work he had undertaken, made him the idol of his men, and gave him hosts of friends."

The New Canaan, Connecticut, Sons of Veterans Camp was named after Colonel Richard E. Holcomb, largely through the efforts of Francis E. Weed, a veteran of the 13th Regiment Connecticut Volunteers. At the dedication, Mary Holcomb Loomis honored the memory of a father she barely knew.

"My brother and sister and I feel deeply grateful for the honor you have done my father's memory by naming this camp after him. I was so young when he died, that my recollection of him is not as good as that which some of the veterans of the 13th Connecticut whom I have met in recent years, entertain. But what I remember of him suggests to me a stern, determined man, who was more of a soldier than a father."

"I remember the home coming of his body after those fearful days at Port Hudson. I can see now the flag entwined casket, the grief of my mother, and remember the solemn pomp of a military funeral."

"My whole life has been changed by the loss of my father, who was a business man as well as a soldier. He lived but a short thirty-eight years, and in that time he had succeeded in educating himself for the engineer's profession, having had the advantages of an academy education, but without the aid of technical school or college."

**“He spoke three languages, he had taken large contracts in bridge building and railroad building, and for nine years was on the Isthmus of Panama, mapping, planning, and building the Panama Railroad; he saw the first tree felled for this railroad, and the last spike driven, and during all those years, he was fighting the diseases of the Isthmus. I have always felt that had this father been spared, he would have accomplished great things for himself and his children.”**

**“We had many souvenirs of camp life in our old home in Granby, but the most conspicuous among them was a large bay saddle horse who had been in the first battle of Bull Run. My father named him “Secessh,” because he was bred in Kentucky. I am sure he must have been a true rebel, for on the Fourth of July he was frenzied to a point painful to see. It was impossible to use him if he heard the report of a firecracker, and the odor of burnt powder would make him tremble almost into convulsions. “Secessh” lived to be an old horse, but never outlived the memory of the battlefield.”**

**“Every life teaches a lesson. It has seemed to me that my father’s life teaches the lesson of perseverance and moral courage. When his effects came north, book after book on military tactics were among them. They were well-thumbed too. He had done his best to prepare himself for the duty that his country’s call had forced upon him, and how well he had done that duty is shown by the moral courage he displayed as he went to his death. Leading his men, his last words were “Charge, forward, double quick!”**

**Mary Holcomb Loomis, throughout her life, tried to get the recognition she thought her father deserved. In 1911 she wrote the following letter to Congressman John Q. Tilson, of New Haven.**

*Dear Sir,*

*I see by our paper that you are to introduce a bill to procure and present to the Survivors of the forlorn hope storming party of Port Hudson, a medal.*

*My father, the late Col. Richard E. Holcomb of the 1st Louisiana Vols., led that charge. My father went out with the 3rd Conn as Quartermaster. Then he re-enlisted as Major of the 13th Conn. When Butler was in Command at New Orleans, Federal troops were raised there, and he, my father was made Col. of this regiment.*

*At Port Hudson he was acting as Brig. Gen. and in command of this storming Party. This engagement started on June 14, 1863 and he was shot and killed in the field.*

*For some reason, possibly because he was in command of a regiment with a Southern name, his memory has been neglected, at least in all press notices. The family now has a medal Senator Bulkly (Morgan G. Bulkeley) sent my sister. I have never seen it.*

*My father had commanded a brigade for six months and because of the isolation of New Orleans, never had received and signed his Brigadier Gen. Commission. I and my family*

*keenly feel this neglect that his memory has received at the hands of the War department. We have suffered financially all our lives from his loss.*

*I write to ask you to see to it that if this bill you are to introduce passes, he be given his just place in history. We feel that the surviving officers should be honored, but know of no reason why a man who died at the head of a charge should not receive equal honor. Col. Birge of Norwich succeeded Col. Richard E. Holcomb (my father) of E. Granby on his death, he was killed on June 14th 1863. You'll have no difficulty in finding his record in the files of the War department. I appeal to you to see to it that his memory receives just recognition.*

*Truly yours,*

*Mary Holcomb Loomis (Mrs.)*

*April 26, 1911*

**In a battered leather trunk the possessions of Colonel Richard E. Holcomb were sent home, with his body, from Louisiana in 1863. His granddaughter Catherine eventually gave the trunk and contents to the Salmon Brook Historical Society in Granby.**

**Parts of his uniforms had been saved by his family: shoulder boards for a lieutenant, a major, and a colonel; red velvet epaulets with gold braid; a faded maroon sash; brass uniform buttons (35 small and 50 large buttons); white kid leather gloves; and a photo of Colonel Holcomb, resplendent in full uniform.**

**There were other accouterments of a soldier: a tin canteen covered with leather, a leather belt with a brass eagle buckle and a sword clip, a leather pistol holder, a cap box containing cartridges for a Colt New Model Pocket Pistol, lead balls and caps, and a copper and brass powder flask embossed with oak leaf and acorn designs.**

**Some items were added later by his daughter Mary. The surveyor's chains used in building the railroad in Panama measure out obsolete links and chains. There is a medal "Connecticut Minutemen April 1881" presented by the State of Connecticut to members of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Volunteer Regiments who enlisted in response to President Lincoln's first call for troops for the defense of Washington in April 1861. A faded ribbon commemorated the 43rd Annual Reunion of the 13th Connecticut Volunteers Veterans Association held at Savin Rock (New Haven, Connecticut) August 13, 1913.**

**An upper tray in the trunk held a Louisiana Secession Flag, which had been captured in Louisiana in 1863, probably by the 13th CT Regiment, and delivered to Colonel Holcomb. The well-used books on military tactics and strategy were carefully saved.**

**There were also items of a personal nature in the trunk: a set of Sheffield steel straight razors in a velvet lined box, a blade engraved for each day of the week; a soldier's sewing kit; Holcomb's wallet containing blank checks, receipts (including one for a case of Claret, two cases of cider, and a box of cigars for a total cost of \$22), other personal papers, and a magnifying glass; a Book of Common Prayer from 1849; a book in French, *Histoire des Idees Sociales*; and a map of New Orleans dated 1860 and inscribed "R. A.Ripley, 13 Regt Conn Vols."**

**Finally, there is a worn, leather-covered portable writing desk, which was used by Holcomb for writing all of his many letters. He used it for the last time the day before he was killed.**

**by Carol Laun  
revised Aug 2010**

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