

Collection #  
SC 1900

JOHN NILSON  
DIARY AND PAPERS, 1862–1865

[Collection Information](#)

[Biographical/Historical Sketch](#)

[Scope and Content Note](#)

[Series Contents](#)

[Cataloging Information](#)

Processed by

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Indiana Historical Society  
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Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF  
COLLECTION:

Manuscript Materials: 3 folders  
Visual Materials: 1 cased image

COLLECTION  
DATES:

1862–1865

PROVENANCE:

Gary Hendershott, Little Rock, AR, 1984; Raynor's Historical  
Collectible Auctions, Burlington, NC, 2009; Brian & Maria  
Green, Inc., Kernersville, NC, 2011

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RELATED HOLDINGS:	John Nilson Papers, 1855–1879 (SC 2031)
ACCESSION NUMBER:	1984.0528, 2009.0379, 2011.0088
NOTES:	This is an artificial collection.

## BIOGRAPHICAL/HISTORICAL SKETCH

According to the 1860 census records John Nilson was born in Pennsylvania about 1832. Some time during the 1850s he moved to Jackson County, Indiana where he acquired a teaching license in 1855. He was married by 1860 and employed as a harness maker living in Woodville, Indiana. His wife's name was Charity and they had a nine-month old son named Oscar. During the Civil War Nilson was mustered into the army at Evansville, Indiana on August 8, 1861 and given the rank of corporal. He served in Company G of the 25<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry Regiment. On August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1864, Nilson was promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant and by January 1, 1865 he was promoted to captain. On July 17, 1865 Nilson was mustered out of the Army at Louisville, Kentucky.

The Nilson family was not found in the Indiana 1870 census records but appeared again in the state of Missouri in the 1880 census. The family had moved and Nilson was listed as a farmer. The family had also grown; in addition to the first son Oscar there were five more sons Walter B., Willie S., Oliver C., Marshal K., and Jasper E., and two daughters Eva and Anna. From the documents in another collection SC 2031, we know that Nilson's son Walter was attending the Missouri Asylum for Educating the Deaf and Dumb in 1879.

John and Charity Nilson appear in the 1920 census when John is 87 years old and Charity is 79. They were living in Twin Groves, in Jasper County Missouri with their grandson Ralph E. Haley.

### **25<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry Regiment**

The 25<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry was organized at Evansville, Indiana in July 1861. In late 1861 the first major engagement for the 25<sup>th</sup> was at Blackwater, Missouri where it was part of a force that captured 1,300 of the enemy.

In February, 1862 it was sent on an expedition against Fort Donelson and joined in the first attack, stormed and captured the outer works the next day, and occupied the fort after its surrender. The Company then marched to Pittsburg Landing, where they took part in the Battle of Shiloh. Their losses were 27 killed and 122 wounded. The battle was a draw, however the Union occupied the battlefield after the Rebels retreated. In June, 1862 the 25<sup>th</sup> took part in the siege at Corinth, Mississippi. Then from July 17, 1862 to September 6, 1862, the company engaged in scouting and hunting rebel guerillas. They also fought a series of small, successful actions against General Earl Van Dorn's Cavalry at Hatchie River and Davis Mill on the Wolf River.

For nearly all of 1863, the 25<sup>th</sup> was on Provost Duty at Memphis, Tennessee and then on railroad guard duty. They then joined General Sherman on a raid through Mississippi down to Meridian.

The Company was reenlisted on February 19, 1864 at Canton, Miss. and then proceeded on to Decatur, Alabama, where they fought several minor skirmishes against Rebel Cavalry. In 1864 they were actively engaged in the Siege of Atlanta. Later that year they attacked and routed General John Bell Hood's army at Snake River Gap. Afterwards they took part in the capture of Savannah, Ga.

Beginning in January, 1865, the 25<sup>th</sup> engaged in several small battles in North Carolina. After General Sydney Johnston's surrender, they marched to Washington, D.C. reaching there on May 17, 1865. G Company, Indiana 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was mustered out at Louisville, Kentucky on July 17, 1865.

Sources:

Materials in the collection

American Civil War Research Database

U.S. Census records for 1860, 1880, 1920

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection is comprised of military papers and personal correspondence, one cased image, and a diary.

Series 1: Military Papers and Personal Correspondence 1862, 1865.

Folder 1 contains G Company papers: a letter addressed to Lt. George W. Fallon concerning the promotion of Sergeant Jacob Hinkle to Lieutenant, two filled in forms of ordinance supplies, and one letter concerning abandoned supplies in Bentonville, North Carolina.

Folder 2 contains two letters of personal correspondence: The first is a letter dated July 9, 1862 while Nilson was at camp near Lagrange, Tennessee. He describes being fired on by civilians while picking blackberries in the woods and an incident at Hollysprings where one soldier was left behind at a plantation only to be hunted down and torn to pieces by blood hounds. The second letter to his wife Charity is dated March 25, 1865. He writes to assure her that he is still among the living and relates some of his recent experiences in South and North Carolina.

One tintype shows Nilson in uniform taken at Vincennes, Indiana and is stored in the Cased Images area.

Series 2: Nilson's Diary is 105 pages long and has been transcribed by the processors. He recorded daily entries beginning at Ridgeway Station South Carolina on February 21<sup>st</sup> 1865 and concludes on March 31, 1865 in North Carolina. Nilson wrote in an abbreviated manner and sometimes his handwriting is difficult to read. In cases where the writing is illegible the processors used square brackets and [sic] after misspelled words.

## SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Military Papers and Personal Correspondence, 1862-1865

### CONTENTS

#### **Military Papers:**

Letter concerning a commission for  
Jacob S. Hinkle, Jan. 26<sup>th</sup> 1865

### CONTAINER

Folder 1

Supplies, January 1865, July 1865

**Personal Correspondence:**

Letter written at camp near Lagrange, Tennessee,  
July 9, 1862

Letter to wife Charity while at Goldsboro, North  
Carolina, March 25, 1865

Folder 2

Tintype portrait of John Nilson, Vincennes, 1861

Cased Images

Series 2: Diary, Feb. 21, 1865–March 31, 1865

**CONTENTS**

John Nilson 1<sup>st</sup> Lieut. Cmdg Co. “G” 25<sup>th</sup> Ind. Inf.  
29 miles north Columbia, S.C. at Ridgeway Station  
S.C. Feb 21<sup>st</sup> 1865

**CONTAINER**

Folder 3

21 Feb. 1865

at 29 mile post-north of Columbia “G” Co. tore up  
52 rails & cross ties piled them for the Engineer  
Corps to fire & twist the iron. I’ve then moved on to  
Camp at Doco Station.

Here one Brigade of the 20 A.C. is guarding the  
town. I heard one of their officers say that their loss  
in killed & wounded will not exceed 20 men from  
the time their Corps left Savannah, Ga.–at this town  
all 4 Corps 15<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> ACS.

All form a function–after some delay we proceed on  
our march over a very poor hilly Country taking a  
road leading east from Winnsboro. 11 Miles & camp  
at Poplar Church on a very high eminence–Marched  
16 miles today high hill at–Poplar Church 10 m east  
of Winnsboro S.C.

23 Feb, 1865

March at 7am. Cross the Waterree River a stream as  
swift & large as the Congaree. March about 5 m &  
camp S & K goes on picket, rained all evening.  
Roads-very slippery. The[re] were about 400 or 500  
old horses & mules. Shot at the River quite a no. of  
the boys swam their mules

24 Feb. 1865

We march about 17 miles through the mud & rain,  
pass through Liberty Hill a small village-Country  
very hilly–

25<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1865

Rained all night & we march this morning at 7  
carrying wet blankets, we march about 3 hr. when  
we leave the hills and get into a low sandy country.  
We march about 3 m today & camp near creek.

Davie our little colored boy filed for the 1<sup>st</sup> time

26 Feb, 1865

rained nearly all night, we have a colored boy Issac to cook for us. we go without arms down to South branch of Linch Creek to raise the ammunion by cuting [sic] short pecies [sic] to put crosswise in the bed then Fence rails lengthwise We cross over about 10am Small horses & mules having to swim. We camp near North Branch of Linch Creek, I buy 2\$ worth Bread & Coffee at CSI [D????]

Monday Feb. 27 1865

We march about 8am, about one mile pasing [sic] 4 Div. which has taken the advance the last 4 days we come to the North Branch of Linch Creek, here we wait about 2 hours then cross on the walkway made by our Pioneers, this is a very bad place to get the train over, it has been all day waiting to cordaroy [sic] the road or swamp for  $\frac{3}{4}$  m.-we camp 1 m. this side it is 26 m from here to Camdon 28 m to Cheraw, S.C. the train commenced crosing [sic] about dark Weather clear & pleasant.

28 Feb, 1865

We march 15 m on the road leading to Cheraw & camp on the left of the road in the wood. I make out Monthly Return & Muster Roster [sic], we are mustered by Lt. Col. L.S. Wright about 2 hours after dark.

March 1<sup>st</sup> 1865

the Regt. goes out foraging today. I remain in camp, not well-Redding brings in about 2 gallons [sic] of good honey – the CO brings in plenty Bacon

2<sup>nd</sup>, March, 1865

Our Brigade goes to the front with 2 peices [sic] of artillery. Gen. Mower goes along. We proceed to within  $6\frac{1}{2}$  m of Cheraw. 25<sup>th</sup> foragers & 4 Companies of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Wis. drove the Rebs back to their works. Noon we get ordered to return to camp immediately. I turn over one Springfield & 2 Enfields, 2 C.B., 2 C.P., 2 scabbards, 2 waist belts, 2 gun slings, Johnson & Hamchild's

3<sup>rd</sup> Mar. 1865

we march at 7am. Our Div. in advances 1<sup>st</sup> Brig in advance our Brig. Reset, after to within 5 m of Cheraw 1<sup>st</sup> Brig. took position right of the road 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade moved forward on the left of the road all massed, then moved up the hill on to fortification in line of Battle. The Rebs were driven by our skirmish

line & drove them over a creek immediately in rear of their works, not giving them time to burn the Bridge. We then shoved forward on quick time most of the way to the beautiful Town of Che raw. 27<sup>th</sup> O.V.V.S being in advance was ordered by Gen. Mower to charge over the Bridge but it being in a large blaze of fire, they hesitated to do this. Mower branded it with cowardice there is no better and braver Regt. in the Service than the 27 [O.O.S.S?]. The bridge soon fell, our Div. Battery rushed forward to the Bluff on the Bank of the Great Pedee & shelled the Rebs. The Rebs fired a very large Depot here burning a large Amt. Munitions of War. Our capture here of Cannons No. near 30—also large quantities of ammunition & machinery etc. we got near all of the flour & meal as they had not time to take it away—large quantity of cotton. This has guards over it which indicates Communication soon

4<sup>th</sup> March 1865

the 1<sup>st</sup> Brig. crosses the river in a pontoon, the pontoons are then put down, noon the 15 AC comes into town. We cross over about 4pm 1<sup>st</sup> advances in line of battle the 3<sup>rd</sup> follows in line as support. Over large fields on both sides of the road—Skirmishers joining some Rifle Pits & the wood [???] but little opposition we then marched on & just as we were preparing camp—Shells of various sizes commenced exploding in quick & rapid succession about a mile in our front, not being certain as to what it was our Div marched out the Rockingham Road about ½ m. on quick time. There we gained some time then returned to camp well smeared with mud

5<sup>th</sup> March 1865

Day clear and pleasant 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> move out & camp on the road in advance – Gossman & Ireland are sent Div. hospital [???] over gun & accoutrements all did [????] Ireland was [????] lost his. 15 AC moves out and take position on the road leading to Rockingham—foragers come in with fine lot of meals.

March 6 1865

Ordered to move at 9am I turn Gosserman gun & accoutrements to Johnson. Our Div. Battery reinforced by two captured guns. One a presentation gun – by an absent citizen to the sovereign state of S.C. We march on the road leading to Bennettville after proceeding 6 m on our way. Our Regt. halted at Henry Eastons Residence here Gen'l Howards Hd. Qrs. at this house, our Regt. hen proceeded to the woods just below and go into camp. 3 out of each

Co, are detailed to go on picket, in charge of Lieut. Hinkle, and two out of each Co. in charge of Lt. Ingram to guard at Howard's Hd. Qrs. This plantation is very large and beautiful, containing 3 mills 2 grist and 1 sawmill, Capt. Bouyers Company is grinding corn near this house, - here Sergt. Hinkle brot [sic] in 2 large hams.

March 7<sup>th</sup> 1865

Receive orders to march at daylight from Col. Vandyke on Gen'l Howards staff. We join our Div. at Bennettsville a beautiful village containing several churches a fine Court House at this place. We head out on the road to Fayetteville, N.C. We go into camp at Beaverdam Church 8 m from Bennettsville, S.C. immediately after stacking arms I am told by Reypholds [?] of Co. E. that his brother Anthony of my Company had just died at Div. Hospital, he was buried near the church by Allsup Elkins [Krieur?] Morgan & myself. He was a good soldier. We passed over the most beautiful country today of any we have yet seen in this state -good farms fences

March 8 1865

Rained during the night & all day we had to lay the nearly all the way with fence rails. - Only marched about 7 m. - crossed the state line &camp at Caledonia Church house

March 9<sup>th</sup> 1865

We march at 6 am. Our taking the advance of the 1<sup>st</sup>. Div. we cross a Rail Road some large swamps, creeks then passed through Floral College. A small village 24 m. from Fayetteville, here the 3<sup>rd</sup> Div turned to the right & take another road, 1<sup>st</sup> Div. follows the 3<sup>rd</sup> our Regt. leaves Companies C., E.& H. to guard the village until the column pass through. This place is situated on or near Lumber River - We march on about 3 Ms. further & camp - A.B. & C. go on picket G. Co. is stationed at the residence of the widow Brown 7 ms. from Floral College

10<sup>th</sup> March 1865

We move across to rice swamp on the main road, here we waited till nearly noon for our Brig to come up it being in the rear we were in centre of Brig. marched over a number of as large swamps as any have yet crossed. Marched til 3 O'clock next morning. Distance 18 m. Linch throws away his gun & G, Sling, C.B. Plate, C.B. Belt, & Plate

March 11 1865

We march at 8am only had about an hours sleep. We

were very tired. We halted here near 11 mi [past?] from Fayetteville N.C. We cross Little Rock River near 9 am past here we see a column of snakes issuing from a large pile of Rosin. Near 7 m post we pass through an old village of frame huts filled with women & children. here is a splendid mill seat, the large cotton factory at this place is in ruins. This place is called Rock Fish Factory. One p.m. we halt in front of Fayetteville, 1 of our foragers was killed by some Rebel Cav. making a dash on them while in town. He belonged to Co. [F?] 25 Ind. Here we camp for the night.

March 12<sup>th</sup> 1865

We march a 7am, pass through the Southern portion of the town Proceed to a point 1 mi below town on the river. Here Co. G & B were thrown forward on the bank of the river to cover the other companies while they crossed in pontoons – our Reg. then advanced about ½ mile. Driving the Rebels back. We through up barricades with rails, here some of Boys finds a large lot meat buried under the smokehouse of on of the [bitterest?] & most ignorant Rebs we have come across yet. Said that we run our slaves from the Northern States South such as Ohio Ind Ill etc. then brot [sic] on the war. the boys dig up fine dishes, crockery ware etc. at the side of the well & carry them to the house telling the woman to keep them in the house. Co “E” makes a dash on some pickets killing 4 & wounding 7 – this old man who lives here seen the Boys finding his things so fast. Went to an apple tree where a lot of Rebel money buried, got it and took it to the house badly [bored?] by the Boys who were having their sport. Several prisoners were brot [sic] in by our Pickets.

Page 61: March 13<sup>th</sup> 1865

We march at 9am drive the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brig. past 4 m P on the road leading to Williamington [sic] near here. We go into camp

March 14<sup>th</sup> 1865

Our Regt. get ordered to go at 7 o'clock. Light Marching Orders. Our Bummers run on to the Rebs nearly m outside of the pickets & drive them about 4 ½ m, heavy skirmishing all the way. One Rebel Lieut. & several others were wounded, they fell back quite stubborn. We then returned to camp, in a few moments we were ordered to get ready to move in 20 minutes. We moved out on the Williamington [sic] Road from the Goldsboro Road go into camp in an old Sandfield to night. We get notice March 7 in the morning

March 15<sup>th</sup> 1865

Cloudy, warm this morning. 3 men out of each company in charge of Lieut. Hinkle detailed for 7 days – march at ½ past 7 passed through a little village called Blockersville 13 m from Fayetteville on the road leading to Newbern, N.C., on Little South River. Here Our Bummers & 9 Ill. M.I. had a sharp skirmish. The Capt. Of “B” Co. was shot twice & bled to death before he could be carried off. One Reb in Blue uniform was killed & two others were wounded on the opposite side –3 mi today

16 March 1865

9 o'clock last night before our wagons could get across – sharp thunder & heavy rain until dark – this morning weather cleared off marched 12 miles yesterday today we lie in camp all day waiting for train to cross. Our 1<sup>st</sup> Div. Pioneer Corps was very busy all day bridging these swamps. We are kept in readiness to move until 12 o'clock midnight. William H. Turner of my Co. died at Div. Field Hospital 2 o'clock PM yesterday.

March 17 1865

One of F. Co. march today with thief on his back. Resume our march at 5. March about 18 m & camp about 9 P.M. Very tired & hungry. Our foragers made a good raise of meat to day.

March 18<sup>th</sup> 1865

We march at 6am. Pass over very good country. Cross river. Distance about 17 m. Camp near Troublefield I draw 4 pairs shoes from R. QM. & issue them to McCart, Krieur, Weddel, & Wolf. 10 o'clock to night, we are caled [sic] to go on picket at Goshon Church House

19<sup>th</sup> [March, 1865]

We march at about 8am – distance today 17 miles. Camp on Bluff first after crossing a big swamp 5 m from the W&G. R.R. Killy & Smith sent to Div. Hospital

March 20<sup>th</sup> 1865

We are aroused by midnight & told to be ready to move in ½ hour – the first Brig. was sometime getting across the big swamp, going back the same road we came on yester evening. Our Brig follows. The following men of G Co., were left in charge of Lt. Wood of E Co. Woody, Wolf, Winter, Linch, McCart, Briner, Hamchild. quite a number of sick & [?????] men were left from our Brig. Peach trees are in full bloom.

We march back about 5 mi. then turn to the right then march about 10 m. thence West about 7 here our Div is put in position in line of Battle on the left of the road . here we advance about ½ mi through a swamp then ordered to halt as the left of the 15 AC had closed on to the right of the 14 AC. During this time very heavy skirmishing & some heavy volleys[sic] as is charging in front of the 14 AC. We hear that 20 AC is on the left of the 14 AC & in front of the 15 AC on the west side of the Rebs who are said by prisoners to be 2 A.C.'s  
Cannonading commenced just as the sun was rising. I counted 250 rounds fired up to about 7am. On our way we waded water waist deep. By noon we had marched 22 mi. This great battle is going on near Bentonville.

21<sup>st</sup> March 1865

Noon 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade of our Div. moved out on a road leading to the right a distance of about 1 ½ mile – then moved by the left flank in line of Battle. 1<sup>st</sup>. Brig Genl. Fullers on the right. 3<sup>rd</sup> Brig., 32<sup>nd</sup> Wis. on his left, 25 Ind. & 10 Ill. on our left. After proceeding about 1 mile through a large swamp & driving the enemy by charging his rifle pits which caused the enemy fallback with some wounded & killed they report belonging to Hardies Corps. We here halted straitened our line then advanced under shelling & heavy musketry firing from the enemy. We were just through the swamp when Corp. Ren fell dead from a musket ball piercing his forehead just above his right eye causing his brains to protrude. He knew not what hit him. We advanced a few yards further up rising ground in front of the Rebel works through thick timber. Hardies whole Corps. made a charge on us in two lines of Battle. We fall back during this time. Henry Delbregher of my Co. fell mortally wounded. Gen'l Fullers Brig. had advanced far enough to get in possession of the Rebs Hospital & Bentonville. While falling back the Regt. became detached from B&G which was governed by the movements of the 10 Ill. as we were ordered by the left [guide?] the right wing swung around while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Div shoved forward on our left under a very heavy fire. We threw up a line of works then moved to the left when the 3<sup>rd</sup> Div. started in our casualties [sic] Capt. Shannon leg broken above his right knee. Time he has been wounded. Jos. Green of "C" mortally wounded. Kline & D. Hauchens of B both badly wounded

22<sup>nd</sup> March 1865

We moved out in front of our works in line of battle in this way we advanced to Benton Ville near Mill Creek. Here we find quite a number of our wounded men in Rebel hospital & just below here 3 or 4 of our men who had been beaten to Death one of them had his head split open by an axe & one of his feet cut off. here the Rebs were finally driven across the river. Gen'l Johnson & his whole army combined. Said to number 35,000. Completely whipt [sic] on his own chosen ground. We then return to our line of works on our way back I sent Sergt. Hinkle & Corp. Allsup to hunt for the body of Ren, they found him striped of all his effects & he was buried where he fell. Henry Delbregher was buried at Div. ground.

23<sup>rd</sup> March 1865

we march at 7 oclock taking the road leading to Goldsboro 12 m of Goldsboro we pass one Div of U.S.C. Troops of the 25 AC & 1 Div. white troops of the 24 AC Comd. by Gen. Terry. We cross falling creek which runs north west. Camp within 5 m of Goldsboro. Capt. Shannon died in one hour after he started in the ambulance.

24 March '65

Col. Wright takes Capt. Shannon to Goldsboro & had him buried. We march about noon. Cross Neuse River on pontoons. Pass through Goldsboro & go into camp. North East of this town about 3 m. Genl Sherman reviewed us as we passed through town. He was in a joyful mood, which is the 1<sup>st</sup> time I have ever seen him look so gleeful. He generally wears a sad look as if in deep study.

25 [March 1865]

We throw up breast works. Draw 4 days full rations of Coffee, Sugar & Bread for the first time since we left Decatur [Ala?] I write letters to my Father, wife, brother A.N. & sister M.A.

26 March 1865

today we receive a very large lot of mail in several batches. I receive a Captains Commission from Gov. Morton bearing date Jan'y 1<sup>st</sup> 1865. Lt. Hinkle one for 1<sup>st</sup>. Lieut. bearing the same date & One for Sergeant Williamson bearing date 4 day Feb. 1865. I make out McBrides Descriptive Roll

27 March 1865

Companies A.B.&G. start to Kingston as train guard. I remain in camp for the purpose making out Muster out and Muster in Rolls for myself & Lieut. Hinkle

28 March 1865

I make out James B. Englands Descriptive Roll on order from Gen'l Howard. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> one for him. I am mustered to day as Captain dating from 26 March '65 on Commission from Gov. O.P. Morton bearing date Jan. 1<sup>st</sup> 1865-

29<sup>th</sup> March 1865

We receive a circular from Gov. Stow of Cal. on behalf of himself & people to Gen'l Sherman & his army congratulating us on the victorious march to the Sea & capture of Savannah Ga. I prefer charges against Private Wm. Elkins for desertion from 24 April 1864 to 31 Jan '65. I make Descriptive Rolls for Rich, King, Gray & Edwards in H at Savannah, Ga. also for Tho's. Smith, Killey, Gossman & Ireland at 1<sup>st</sup> Div. H, 17 A.C.

March 30 '65

Companies A.B.&C. return this morning from Kinston. Lieut. Hinkle is mustered in as 1<sup>st</sup>. Lieut. by Capt. Wm. H. Car. I receive a letter from Uncle Neely Sawhill.

March 31 '65

Friday weather clear & pleasant. I receive letter from Father & one from Bro. A.N. who is in Adams Hospital, Memphis, Tenn.

John Nilson Capt.

'G 25 Ind. Inf.

3 rd Brig. 1 Div. 17 A.C.

## CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://opac.indianahistory.org/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, SC 1900).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.