

*RUFUS S. RICE*

*Pvt. 17<sup>th</sup> Reg. CT Vol. Infantry*

*August 1862 - January 1863*



## Rufus Samuel Rice

Union Civil War Ancestor of Scott A. Reese, PDC

Revised February 2026

Family history shows that Rufus Samuel Rice was born in Somerstown, New York on October 31, 1843. He was the son of Samuel Rice and Sally Platt Brush, both of South East (now Brewster) New York, Putnam County. The Rices trace their American ancestry to John Rice from Suffolk, England. He settled in Dedham, Massachusetts in the 1640s. Eventually, Rufus' family line went through Connecticut and then on to New York.

Rufus Rice was my great, great grandfather directly through my mother, a Danbury Connecticut native. Rufus became a Danbury, Connecticut resident sometime after moving from Somerstown (or Somers), NY (just west of Danbury). He was here working as a hatter at age 18, where he enlisted in the 17th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry on August 19, 1862.

Except for a few residence listings and some family portraits, not much survives about the life of Rufus. What I have learned comes from the genealogical research by the wife of a Rufus Rice descendant. Rufus was one of ten children, and all but two were born in New York state. The family moved to Danbury after 1846 as records show two other Rice's were born there. Thereafter, four more generations of Rice's would be born there.

It is worth noting historically that Danbury was at the center of the U.S hatting industry in the 1800's. It is possible that Rufus' family moved there to take advantage of better employment opportunities. In the early 19th century there were two periods of economic downturns causing "employment crashes." One was between 1836-37 and the other was in 1846-47. Samuel Rice was a shoemaker according to census data. He probably earned a manageable living as a photograph of him taken late in life shows he was

a well-suited man.

The hatting industry was essential to Danbury's economy. In fact it was the hat making "capital" of the country. By 1860, Danbury was employing hundreds of men in various capacities and factories. This was a significant line of work for many men who volunteered to serve in Fairfield County Regiments. In Rufus' Company alone, 32 of them were occupationally identified as hatters.

Following the announcement made by President Lincoln on 1 July 1862 to raise additional troops, the State of Connecticut and Danbury answered the call. The town hosted the Governor and leading Danbury men of industry to secure a Regiment for service. In an amazing statement, the Governor actually called for the cessation of work (consider Danbury's importance!) when he proclaimed:

"Close your manufactories and workshops, turn aside from your farms, leave for awhile your families and your homes, meet face to face the enemies of your liberties! Haste, and you will rescue many noble men now struggling against superior numbers, and speedily secure the blessings of peace and good government!"

Rufus enlisted on 19 August 1862. Ten companies were formed from the towns of Fairfield County, and the 17th Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry was sworn in to U.S. service on August 28, 1862 in Bridgeport, CT. Coincidentally, this is the date of Second Manassas, or 2nd Bull Run as it is also known. Although Rufus' military service would be short-lived (as described shortly) some of the people he had to know in his company would play historical roles as I will describe in this brief history. One is William Warren, who wrote a voluminous first hand history of the 17th, and another is Phineas Lounsbury, a private (with a shorter service period than Rufus) would later rise to be President of the 17th CT Volunteers Association and future Governor of Connecticut.

Fortunately, all this and more can be obtained from a terrific

website dedicated to the 17th CVI found at <https://seventeenthcvi.org> (or [17thcvi.org](https://17thcvi.org)). Many of the facts I cite are from this website.

A brief history of the 17th CVI is summarized as follows:

1862: Duty at Fort Marshall, Defenses of Baltimore.  
Tennallytown, building Fort Kearney, October 15-November 3.  
Duty at Brook's Station, Va., December, 1862, to April, 1863.

1863: Battle of Chancellorsville May 1-5.  
Battle of Gettysburg July 1-3.  
Moved to Folly Island, S.C., August 1-12.  
Siege operations on Morris Island, S.C., against Forts Wagner and Gregg, and against Fort Sumter and Charleston August 15-September 7.  
Capture of Forts Wagner and Gregg September 7.  
Moved to Folly Island, S.C., and duty there, operating against Charleston, S.C., until February 1864.

1864 - 1865: Service in Florida (Jacksonville, St. Augustine, with various engagements).

1865: Mustered out in Jacksonville, July 19.

During the Virginia encampments, Rufus experienced a condition that ultimately led to his discharge. In his papers, William Warren said they reached Chantilly on November 19 and stayed until December 10. Up to this point there was no active fighting, just soldiering and bivouacking. It was during this time before they reached Stafford Court House, VA, on about December 12/13, that Rufus was no longer fit for soldierly duties. As the Surgeon wrote in his official discharge paper of January 17th, 1863, Rufus was medically discharged on account of a "right inguinal hernia produced by exertion in lifting a waggon (sic)" lasting "two months duration." Perhaps this was due to the mud and rain, when a sutler or camp train got stuck or needed moving. Since the Surgeon could not "make him useful" by any means, he had to recommend a medical discharge. The papers I received from the National Archives did not include any pension relief from the government. And so ended Rufus Rice's military service at the tender age of 19.

The fact that Rufus did not make it to Gettysburg in 1863 may be the reason (in part) he survived to have descendants. The trials of the 17th CT at Gettysburg read like many other Union units that participated in those fateful days in July. Records show that of the 386 men of the 17<sup>th</sup>, 20 killed, 81wounded, and 96 went missing. In Company C, the stats are 4 killed, 17 wounded (7 died from their wounds), and 12 were captured. At Barlow's Knoll, where the fighting occurred on the first day of battle, there is a magnificent monument honoring the 17<sup>th</sup> CVI.

Rufus returned to Danbury after his service. Regardless of his injury, he went on to marry and had eleven children, most of whom were born in Danbury. Of these eleven, seven were males. The 1900 US Census had him and his family living on West William St. in Danbury. During his lifetime he switched trades, moving from hatting, to police, and to carpentry work.

Rufus Rice's obituary of December 28, 1904 stated that he "was formerly" a member of the GAR while living in Danbury. I personally do not have any information available to corroborate this or what positions he may have served in. However, his son Harry Storm Rice was involved in the Sons, and in June, 1927 he became the Department Commander in Connecticut ("Danbury Man Heads Sons of Union Veterans," Bridgeport Telegram, 6/18/1927).

Rufus Samuel Rice was survived by all 11 of his children. He is buried in Danbury, CT at Wooster Cemetery, Section 9, plot 3. His son Harry, is interred to his left.



RUFUS S. RICE

Co. C. 17 REGT.

CONN. VOLS.

DIED DEC 28 1904

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