

53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry

Company C

"The Sentinel" June 2023

Newsletter of The James Creek Guards



"Clubs Are Trumps!"

This Month:

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I am always looking for newsletter content, so please forward your articles, CW-related movie or book reviews, event summaries/photos, stories, etc. to me for inclusion in a future edition of "The Sentinel". – Matthew Steger, editor

WISLER HOUSE UPDATE

NPS has been working on the Wisler House project for some time and it appears that the exterior work is nearly complete. I stopped by on 22 April and grabbed some photos of the exterior and interior. According to NPS, the interior will not be open to the public in 2023. A small gravel parking area has been installed in the rear yard and the front porch was rebuilt.





THE DIARY OF BENJAMIN JAY CUSHING (53RD PVI, CO. G) -

[Transcribed and provided to me by Thomas Kear, a direct descendent of the Cushing brothers. Any typos or grammatical errors were left in place. – editor]

1863 (note - Both Benjamin and his brother Leavitt were wounded at Fredericksburg in December 1862)

July 1 – Start in the morning towards the Pa. Line. Halt at noon at Taney Town, & then march to within 4 or 5 miles of Gettysburg. And go out on picket. Our forces encountered the rebs at the town today.

July 2 – March to the front near the Forces where our boys are in line of battle. Some skirmishing going on in the forenoon. In the afternoon have a hard fight & loose some men killed & many wounded.

July 3 – Form on the front & throw up slight breastworks of rails, stones, & dirt. Have hard shelling all day, but not many hurt. Two or three caissons blown up along our lines. 50 or 60 of the rebel skirmishers gave themselves up and came in.

July 4 – Our skirmish lines gained the position which the enemys Arty. occupied yesterday & our troops are busy burying the dead. Sad business to be engaged in on the anniversary of our national Independence. May God grant in mercy that peace may be restored ere another one comes.

July 5 – Our skirmishers advance and find that the enemy have left, and our forces follow. There is some Arty. firing in the distance. We move out a few miles to the Two Taverns, stop after dark, & Bivouac for the night.

July 6 – Lay all day at the Two Taverns. Go up to the Hospt. in the afternoon & see Wilson & the rest of our boys, find Wilson quite comfortable. Am very thankful he is so slightly wounded.

July 7 – Started early in the morning and march to Taney Town, where we camp for the night. Receive a large mail of which all are very glad. Write to M in the afternoon.

July 8 – Raining hard early in the morning. Start at 5 o'clock for Frederic have a very muddy time of it. Stopps raining in the afternoon. Stopp for the night within 5 mi. of the City, marched 19 mi.

July 9 – Start early and pass through Frederic & on towards Harpers Ferry. Recd. News of the surrender of Vicksburg. Saw a tree a ½ mi. from the road on which a rebel spy was hung. It was peeled and crowds were visiting the spot to look at the body which lay at the foot of the tree.

July 10 – Encamped on the top of South Mtn. Marched this morning towards Antietam battlefield, pass through Kedeysville and pass the right of the battlefield & stopped at noon in the woods. Some Arty. Firing in front, lay in line of battle over night.

July 11 – Lay in line of battle all day. I am on Hed. Qt. Guard at night.

July 12 – Lay quiet all the forenoon. Received our mail in the afternoon. About 4 o'clock move out nearer the rebs, and through up slight breastworks, working til late in the night, all very tired.

July 13 – Lay still all day after finishing our works in the morning, raining hard in the afternoon, get full accounts of the fall of Vicksburg in todays papers, heavy shower in the evening.

July 14 – Formed our Div. In skirmish line and advanced towards the rebels works, but find them deserted, advance to Williamsport & then go down the river 3 or 4 miles. Saw a large number of prisoners taken by the Cavalry and thre Rebbls Collors, rains in the afternoon.

July 15 – Start early in the morning & march out onto the main road, & down the river towards Harpers Ferry. Pass through Sharpsburg, and down the river & cross the Antietam creek at its mouth take the towpath & go to within 1 ½ mi of H.F. and camp on the bank of the river, rained in the afternoon.

July 16 – March to Sand Hook & camp, pitch tents etc. draw clothing of all sorts of which many stand in need. Write home in the afternoon.

July 17 – Very rainy. Write to M in the forenoon. Rec. mail in the afternoon and a letter from Charles who is at Chambersburg, in the militia. Rec. the Examiner once more. Expect to move in the morning for the Virginia side of the Potomac.

July 18 – Waked at 3 o'clock and ordered to get ready to march at 4 o'clock. Cross the Potomac & Shenandoah at Harpers Ferry, and go up the Loudon Valley. Camp a little after noon. Have a good dinner of berries, bread, and butter. Go on picket after dark.

July 19 – Go on post at 6 o'clock A.M. and are called in to march at noon. March slowly til 5 o'clock and halt for the night near Snicker's Gap. Have another feast on berries which are very plenty. Write to Charles C.

July 20 – Start in good season and march slowly all day. Camp about two miles beyond Booneville and to within 5 miles of Upperville. Lieut. Roberts came to the Comp. Last night.

July 21 – Lay all day in camp. Busy myself reading, writing, & washing, also cleaning up our guns. All are encouraged by the favorable turn things have taken since we left Falmouth. May we all be thankful to the giver of all good for his favors to us as a nation.

July 22 – Write to M. in the morning. Go and get a pail of berries for dinner. March afternoon to Ashbys Gap 11 miles. Our Brigade is sent up into the Gap and go on picket. The Cavalry have been holding the Gap til now.

July 23 – Have a fine view of the County in either valley from the Gap. Leave the gap at 3 o'clock P.M. & march to within 2 miles of Manassas Gap. Stop a little while, & then start at dark for the Gap & travel til 1 o'clock before halting, have rough roads.

July 24 – Gen. Meade and staff passed by early this morning. He goes back about noon & the 2nd Corps packs up and move back down to the mouth of the Gap where we Bivouac for the night.

July 25 – Start at daylight and march to white plains, reach there and bivouac for the night about 4 o'clock March about 17 miles.

July 26 – Start early and march through New Baltimore & reach Warrenton at noon and halt, rest & make coffee. March on to near Warrenton Junction and halt, put up pour tents. We passed many on the road that were overcome with the heat lying by the side of the road. March 20 miles.

July 27 – Lay all day in camp. Busy reading, writing, and washing, Rec. our mail at night for the first time since leaving Harpers Ferry. Writing home and also to M. Have many showers during the day and night.

July 28 – Nothing particular going on in camp today, rec. several letters at night. A detail of 7 men are to leave in the morning for the purpose of bringing the drafted men to the regt.

July 29 – George Freeman goes from Co. G after the conscripts, all quiet in camp today. Go after berries in the afternoon. George's Express box arrives at night, & we try the good things it contains, having his permission.

July 30 – Everything moves on in the same old style, we hardly know whether to expect a march or not. Received orders at 3 o'clock to pack up and be ready to march. Start at 5 o'clock and take the old route to Fredericksburg & bivouac for the night. March 10 miles.

July 31 – Find ourselves at a place called Elk Town. March 5 or 6 miles and halt and pitch tents. Very warm day and all are glad to stop. Pick a pail of berries for supper. Go on guard at night.

WINSLOW HOMER SOUVENIR CARD

Noted American artist Winslow Homer (1836 ~ 1910) created a series of drawings entitled "Life In Camp" originally published circa 1864 by L. Prang & Co. The series was exhibited in "The Civil War in America" at the Library of Congress in 2013. This month's image is entitled "Stuck In The Mud".



BOOK REVIEW: PATTERSON'S INDEPENDENT COMPANY OF ENGINEERS AND MECHANICS 1861-1865

Author: Charles H. Bogart

Reviewed by Mike Espenshade

Paper Back; 2020; Yellow Sparks Press, Frankfort KY; 143 pp.; in addition: 25 pictures and maps, 0 pp notes, 2 pp bibliography, 2 pp index. \$12.98 on Amazon.

Very few Union campaigns in the Civil War did not benefit from the critical services provided by the “Engineers”. The Army of the Potomac benefited from the services of all four companies of Regular U.S.A. Engineers and three companies of New York Volunteer Engineering Regiments (1st, 15th, 50th).

Out “west”, Patterson’s Independent Company of Engineers and Mechanics formed in Kentucky in the fall of 1861. Captain William F. Patterson and 33 men comprised one of but a small handful of volunteer engineering companies who served in the Western Theater campaigns. No Regular U.S.A. Engineer companies served in the Western Theater. Patterson’s men comprised the 500 or so engineers (mostly from Missouri) in Grant’s army during the Vicksburg Campaign.

Men of engineering companies worked extremely hard and long hours, especially at night. They were expected to construct/instruct field fortifications, construct permanent fortifications, build lines of communications roads/fortifications/facilities, build/improve roads, prepare fords/crossings, build and operate pontoon bridges and ferries, build/repair railroads, construct warehouses/barracks, harvest timber and run sawmills, building of docks and levies for river and ocean-going ships, construct rear-supply bases and winter quarters, locate/dig suitable water supply.

Depending on the tasks ordered, these few engineers could count on hundreds of men borrowed from nearby infantry regiments for the brute labor and speed required.

As the engineers sadly found out, much of their toil had to be “undone” and destroyed whenever the armies were leaving a territory to the enemy. Many of the bridges and roads they built, mostly in a hurry over-night in order to surprise the enemy, needed to also be destroyed, by their own hand, a short time later.

The topics of logistics and engineering always interested me, so I bought this book. In many ways, it did not disappoint. During Grant’s operations during the lengthy Vicksburg Campaign, daily departures of steamboats from Cairo IL transported the minimum daily needs of the army of >1000 tons: 100 tons of quartermaster stores; 220 tons of commissary stores; 420 tons of animal forage; 50 tons of engineering supplies; 50 tons of ordnance supplies (box of 1000 .58 caliber cartridges = 98 pounds); 70 tons of mail, sutler, medical, etc. goods. This does not include the tons and tons supply of coal, ammunition, food, and goods needed to keep the transport ships afloat and provision the ironclads already on-station further down river.

Patterson’s men served also in the 1862 Cumberland Gap campaign, Red River campaign, the 1864 east Texas coastline fortification campaign, and in the New Orleans campaign. From Pass Cavallo Tx, along the beach in March 1864, a Lt. Bentley writes, “...drift-wood gathered along the coast did not burn very well, especially when the wind was blowing which was nearly all the time... we dug holes in the ground and in them build our cooking fires ... of course, the wind would generously sprinkle our rations with sand which was gritty to the teeth and taste ... we had “grit in the craw” enough for any emergency ... we supplemented our army rations by killing an attacking Confederate cavalry regiment disguised as sheep.”

I enjoyed learning much about the innovative approaches to constructing bridges/pontoons across bayous and swamps, etc. Especially good were the details about building the Navy gunboat-saving dam in early May 1864 on the falling Red River water levels. They needed to raise the water level over obstructive falls = so the 15+ ships could retreat down the river. These ships would have been stranded upstream, and had to be scuttled and burned, otherwise.

The book would have been much more enjoyable had source notes been provided, and if most of the maps and pictures were legible. No picture of Captain W. K. Patterson or of any of his men was provided.

ANCESTORS OF TWO TWENTIETH-CENTURY HOLLYWOOD INFLUENCERS CLASH IN ANTIETAM'S CORNFIELD

Kevin Pawlak, April 21, 2023, blueandgrayeducation.org

Some of the most popular movies portraying the Civil War appeared on the big screen in the era before and during the centennial anniversary of the conflict. Two of those films include *Gone with the Wind* (1939), based on Margaret Mitchell's novel published three years earlier, and *Shenandoah* (1965), starring Jimmy Stewart.





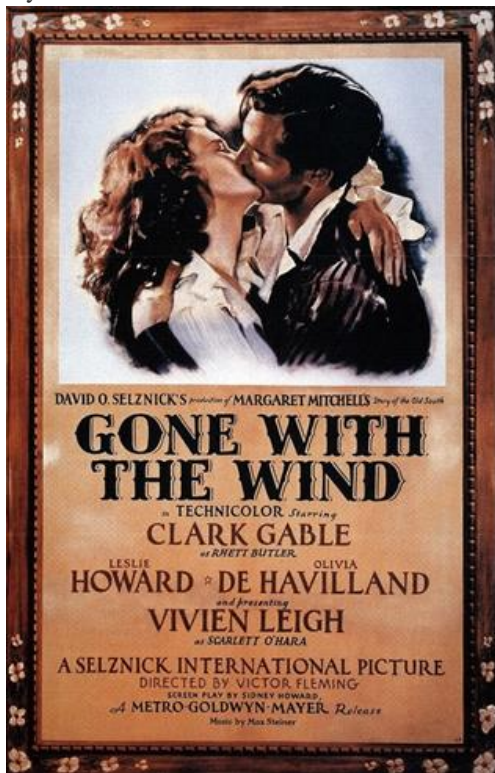
Margaret Mitchell in 1941 | LOC



Jimmy Stewart in 1948 | public domain

Both films portray Southern families caught up in the Civil War and how the war immensely affected their lives. It should come as no surprise that two of the leading hands in these films, which shaped people's perceptions of the Civil War for years to come, likely drew inspiration from their grandfathers, both of whom served in the war.

While filmmakers adapted Mitchell's literature into a film, Mitchell's fingerprints are all over the screen version of *Gone with the Wind*. She grew up hearing and feeling war stories from her grandfather, Sgt. Russell Crawford Mitchell of the 1st Texas Infantry. Russell was born and raised in Georgia but moved to Texas a couple of years prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Mitchell supported secession and raised a company of Texans to fight in the war. His company voted to enter the scene of war in Missouri. Mitchell, however, "believed the big fighting would be" in Virginia and so resigned his command and joined Company I of the 1st Texas.



Film poster for *Gone With the Wind* | public domain



Film poster for *Shenandoah* | public domain



Actor Jimmy Stewart's grandfather, Samuel McCartney Jackson, grew up in Apollo, Pennsylvania, and joined the state militia as 12-year-old drummer boy. In August 1861, Jackson was commissioned Captain of Company G, 11th Pennsylvania Reserves. He quickly rose to lieutenant colonel of the regiment by October and commanded the 11th Pennsylvania Reserves at Antietam.

Lt. Col. Samuel McCartney Jackson / public domain

In the early morning's action of September 17, 1862, the 1st Texas Infantry plunged headlong unsupported into David Miller's 24-acre cornfield. When Sergeant Mitchell and the Texans approached within 30 yards of the cornfield's northern fence, a volley ripped into their ranks. That sheet of fire came mostly from the Federals directly in their front, Pennsylvanians led by Samuel M. Jackson. Those Pennsylvanians, resting their rifles on the fence rails in their front, decimated the 1st Texas, which staggered to the rear having suffered over 80 percent casualties.

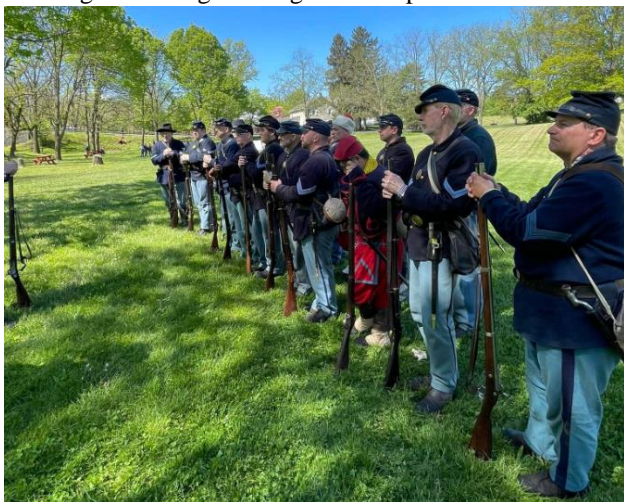
One of those Texas casualties was Russell Mitchell, "his skull broken in by two minie balls," recalled his granddaughter Margaret. Mitchell was carried from the field and taken to an aid station near the Dunker Church. There, a surgeon examined his grisly wound and "declared there wasn't any use in wasting time on him when he would only live a few hours." However, Sergeant Mitchell incredibly survived. Margaret Mitchell remembered visiting her grandfather years later. During these family visits, "his children and grandchildren loved to put their fingers in the depressions in his skull." Sergeant Mitchell lived over four decades after receiving his supposedly mortal wound and died in Atlanta in 1905.

On the other side of the field, Lieutenant Colonel Jackson survived. In his diary entry of September 17, 1862, Jackson succinctly penned, "Terrific fighting... Our little Regiment badly cut up." After the war, Jackson became a member of Pennsylvania's legislature and state senate. He died not long after Sergeant Mitchell, breathing his last in 1906. Jimmy Stewart was born two years after the death of his grandfather, but it is possible he grew up listening to the stories of Samuel M. Jackson during the Civil War.

It is interesting to think that Civil War ancestors—Margaret Mitchell's as she wrote her book that soon became a national hit on the silver screen; and Jimmy Stewart's, when he portrayed Charlie Anderson in *Shenandoah*—influenced their grandchildren in their roles of shaping popular perceptions of the Civil War.

NR CAMP OF INSTRUCTION SUMMARY

On 4~6 May, the NR held its annual Camp Of Instruction at Gruber Wagon Works near Reading. The weather was great although the mornings were a tad chilly. We had a good turnout and ran through many items and drill maneuvers including skirmish drill, dress parade, etc. that we will be utilizing at Gettysburg 160 in June. On Friday, the group also hosted school students and ran them through drill. Photos below are the courtesy of Tom Carlson, Eric and Traci Ford, and Chip Smith. Evenings including chatting with our pards around the camp fires.









HUMMELSTOWN MEMORIAL DAY PARADE SUMMARY

On 29 May, the unit participated once again in Hummelstown's Memorial Day Parade. From our normal position near the front of the parade, we followed a path through town which included a volley in the Square and concluded at the cemetery. Afterwards, we advanced to a debriefing at Cpl. Espenshade's hut. Participating were: Sgts. Fasnacht, Benedict, and Steger. Cpls Espenshade and Brumbaugh. Privates Parvis, Ford, Espenshade, Fedorshack, Hale. And musician Thomas. Hale was a guest of the 53rd PVI. Kaitlin Kennedy fell in with us; she portrays Nurse Mary Bale. Her husband was Corp. John Bale of Hummelstown's 127th PVI.



SUV MEMORIAL DAY CEREMONY

On Tuesday 30 May, several of us participated in a Memorial Day service hosted by the Sons of the Union Veterans at the GAR section of Lancaster Cemetery. Participating were Sgts. Fasnacht, Benedict, and Steger and Privates R. Dicks, J. Dicks, and Ford. We even made it on TV in a segment that WPMT (Fox43) did covering the ceremony.



FROM THE DESK OF THE PRESIDENT

It's been a few issues since I've added my two cents to the newsletter so I'm taking this opportunity to cover a few bases. First, the 160th Gettysburg event is coming up quickly. I'm not going to repeat what has been shared several times already but I just want to remind everyone that you need to be on-site and set up by 1:00pm on Friday. Vehicles **MUST** be removed from camp by this time also. If you're going to arrive later than this, please inform me so I can let our Officer know. For this event we'll be under Capt. Rick Betley with the 8th OH. We've served under Rick many times and it's always been smooth. The most repeated theme for this event right now is the presence of ticks and chiggers on the field. Please prepare yourself as best as possible by pretreating your gear (gum blankets, wool blankets, tents and your uniform). Take **LOTS** of rounds! Tom Downes is telling me that you'll need more than last year at Antietam. I will suggest that

each man take no less than 125. Additionally, if you own a black slouch hat, take it along. If not, no problem. No need to buy one.

Second, Landis Valley will be our next event and I'm counting on a strong 53rd turnout. We will have our traditional Saturday evening meal and Sunday breakfast in the hotel. I will need to provide a count so the budget can be worked out. Let me know ASAP if you will be there.

We've noticed at the past few events that we have several rifles in the ranks that are in need of attention. There will be a lot of emphasis on safety at the Gettysburg event. Please give your rifle as much attention as required before the event. Make sure the half cock safety functions properly. If your half cock doesn't function you will be pulled from the ranks until you can repair it.

See y'all soon!

Eric

THE CIVIL WAR MERCHANT

(if you have something for sale or are looking for something to add to your kit, email me your ad or want for a future edition of "The Sentinel")

For Sale –

(1.) Dave Townsen, a fellow pard of mine in the old 83rd PVI, is selling off most of his CW gear. You can contact him directly at: grumpydave58@comcast.net with any inquiries about items, pricing, etc. He lives in Mechanicsburg and he has quality gear.

(2.) I have a C&D Jarnagin size 46 federal enlisted frock coat for sale. Still in great condition. Email me with any questions/inquiries: n3ntj@outlook.com

(3.) Kerry Williard is handling the sale of Dave Swigert items for Dave's wife. Marc and I met a few years ago to look over the items and give them descriptions and approx. values. Several of the items have been sold yet some remain. The list is current as of 9 May 2023. Contact Kerry directly with any and all inquiries: shamokin71@aol.com (see the updated list below)

Quantity	Item Description	Detailed Description	Selling
Armaments			
1	1861 Springfield Rifle - Armi Sport		\$900.00
Uniform Clothing			
1	Trouser - Steel Blue each with suspendors	34 min waist/27" inseam-avg. condx and a little dirt w/ braces no watch pck	Price \$25.00
1	Dk Blue Vest Size 42	3 pockets - light wear	\$20.00
1	Colored Pattern Shirt	blue plaid with white china buttons - sun faded - good condx	\$10.00
1	White muslin Shirt	19" at shoulder 14" neck - very short in body length	\$5.00
1	White muslin Shirt	20" at shoulder 16" neck - very short in body length - cuffs are stained	\$5.00
1	Underpants - Night Pants - White	36" waist - knee stains - 25" inseam white muslin - rear repair	\$3.00
1	Lt Brown Scarf - Acrylic - Modern		\$1.00
1	Havelock - White - VG condx		\$2.00
1 pairs	Grey Wool Socks - Modern		\$2.00/pr
2	Hats - Union & Confederate for cchildren		\$1.00
Accoutrements			
1	Scabbord -Late war 7 Rivet		\$15.00
1	Gum Blanket	some cracking with oversized grommets	\$20.00
1	Grey Smooth Face Canteen - Leather Sling Satinette Cover w/ Corded Stopper		\$20.00
1	Haversack - Tarred Black - Brittle Strap w/opwn seam		\$5.00
1	Haversack - Tarred Black w/Liner- Paint peeling Holes @ Strap Connection		\$10.00
1	Grey Smooth Face Canteen - Leather Sling Satinette Cover w/ Corded Stopper		\$20.00
Misc Items			
1 can	sno-seal (half full)		\$1.00
1	Wood Mirror - Haversack filler	sliding cover	\$3.00
1	Wood Comb - Haversack filler		\$1.00
1	Wooden button board		\$1.00
2	Coin Purses - Made from Tic Material		\$1.00/ea
1	Bag with Coffee	brown coffee	\$1.00/ea
2	Soap Bar		\$1.00/ea
1	box rifle cleaning kit	pads, steel wool, rags, etc	\$5.00
1 Pair	shoe tree		\$3.00
1	Green Army Duffle Bag		\$3.00
1	drawers for use as patches		\$1.00

2023 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

~~15 January~~ Holiday Party ~~Gettysburg~~ (private)
~~4 February~~ Winter Drill ~~Landis Valley~~ (our NR pards are invited)
~~18-19 February~~ NR School of Instruction (Gettysburg Fire Hall)
~~25 March~~ Cartridge Rolling Party (1st Sgt.'s Home)
~~1 April~~ ELF Drill at Ft. McHenry
~~15 April~~ Patriotic Order Sons of America (POSoA) event (Robesonia)
~~6-7 May~~ NR Camp Of Instruction (COI) ~~Gruber Wagon Works~~ (Reading, PA)
~~29 May~~ Memorial Day Parade (Hummelstown) **[Max Effort]**
~~23-25 June~~ - Gettysburg 160 **[Max Effort]**
~~15-16 July~~ - Landis Valley Civil War Days (Lancaster) **[Max Effort]**
~~12 August~~ - Safe Harbor Cemetery - grave rededication
~~8-10 September~~ - Thunder on the Gauley (Summersville, WV - Carnifax Ferry Battlefield) **[Max Effort]**
~~14-15 October~~ - USAHEC Army Heritage Days (Carlisle) **[Max Effort]**
~~18 November~~ - Remembrance Day (Gettysburg) - NR Annual Meeting and Parade



Secondary schedule -

~~20 May~~ Lancaster Cemetery - grave decoration day
~~28-20 July~~ - Receding Tide - Trenches of Williamsport
~~14-15 October~~ - Cedar Creek re-enactment

For updated event info and other news, please check out the Facebook pages of the 53rd PVI and/or the National Regiment (links below) and check your email on a regular basis

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National Regiment Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/842904089142263>

