

# 53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Company C

"The Sentinel" September 2023

Newsletter of The James Creek Guards



"Clubs Are Trumps!"

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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*

## **CONFEDERATE BLOCKADE OF WASHINGTON, DC**

Waite Rawls, July 24, 2023

[blueandgraveducation.org](http://blueandgraveducation.org)

*North battery of the Confederates at Shipping Point, on the Virginia side of the Potomac, looking up the river | [New York Public Library Digital Collections](#)*

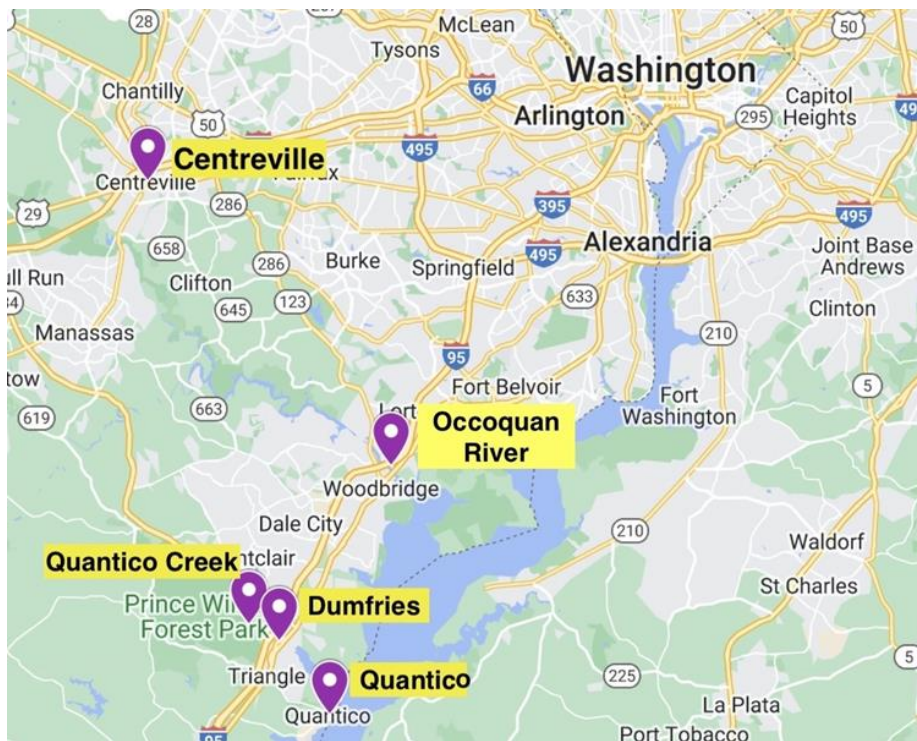


The most important, yet under told, story of the early period of the Civil War did not happen in the Deep South, or in the Western Theater, or the Atlantic, but very close to Washington, D.C. From October 1861 until March 1862, the Confederates effectively blockaded the U. S. capital city with artillery batteries that closed off the Potomac to Union ship traffic into or out of Washington, while allowing supplies to cross the Potomac to Virginia from Confederate-sympathizing Charles County in Maryland.

The Confederates had earlier thought to build their batteries at Mathias Point, just upriver from the current US 301 bridge; but they abandoned that effort because it was too far away from supporting infantry forces. Instead, they worked frantically, and in secrecy, during the August-September 1861, period to build a series of batteries between Occoquan and Quantico Creeks, with the biggest batteries at

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Evansport and Shipping Point, near current day Quantico, and Cockpit Point, just to the north of Quantico Creek. The batteries were supported on shore by two Confederate units stationed in Dumfries, each of which would become famous later in the war, the Texas Brigade and Wade Hampton's Legion.



*Points of interest of the Confederate offensive just south of Washington*

Ready for action and opening fire in mid-October, these Confederate batteries forced the Union Navy to redirect all ship traffic out of the Potomac and to use Baltimore instead of Washington, much to the embarrassment of Lincoln, his Navy, and his Army. By that time, never-ready-for-action George McClellan refused to send Union land troops down the southern side of the river from Alexandria to dislodge the Confederates. Instead, he dispatched a division to the Maryland side opposite the Confederates, where they could do no harm nor any good. The Union soldiers noticed there were few men around in the Maryland homes and assumed that the women were widows,

only to discover later that the ladies had husbands who were very much alive and had gone South to fight with the Confederacy.

It was curious. The North had blockaded the Southern ports with its fleet of ships, and the South had used its artillery to blockade Washington, where supplies withered and prices soared, as the overwhelmed Baltimore & Ohio Railroad was its only supply link with the rest of the world. This condition lasted throughout December, January, and February as northern impatience with McClellan's intransigence built.

The breakthrough finally came on March 9, 1862, but not from any Northern action. In February, Jefferson Davis gave Confederate general Joseph Johnston the permission to pull back from Centreville, Dumfries, and the Potomac River. Wasting no time, Johnston burned his supplies, exploded extra ammunition, and moved farther south in the direction of Fredericksburg, giving up the blockade.

## **THE DIARY OF BENJAMIN JAY CUSHING (53<sup>RD</sup> 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

Oct. 1 – Have inspection at 9 o'clock A.M. After which busy policing and visiting a little with Harman Drale who came to see me. Settle up accounts for the month & the day is gone.

Oct. 2 – Very rainy morning. Write to Henry C. in forenoon. Witnessed the execution of a deserter in the afternoon in the field in front of Div. Hd. Qts. All dislike to witness such scenes. Who shall decide as to the justice of such proceedings? Who is wise enough to decide whether it be right or wrong?

Oct. 3 – Busy getting ready to go on picket, fall in before noon and reach the line by 2 or 3 o'clock P.M. Have to be up nearly all night. Music by the rebel bands til late in the evening.

Oct. 4 – One of the men traded papers. Inquirer & Examiner for the "Richmond Examiner" & "R - -d Dispatch" Get relieved and get into camp early. Take a good nap, then a good supper. Then hear a good sermon from Ch. 2<sup>nd</sup> Del. Reg. Rec. a couple of good letters & a good picture which finishes the one day which has been pleasant.

Oct. 5 – Busy writing in the forenoon. An order is read in the afternoon giving the Soldiers a chance to reenlist by which they are to have \$402.00 premium or bounty. Most of them think they will reenlist. Have orders to be ready to march at 6 o'clock in the morning.



Oct. 6 – Started at sunrise & marched to Culpeper & two miles beyond & encamp, pitch our tents in regular order, Marched 14 or 15 miles and all are quite tired.

Oct. 7 – Do our washing in the forenoon. Busy in the morning policing our Street & cleaning up camp. Lowery and wet day. Bank up our tent so as to keep out the wind & cold, get no mail today. Very hard rain in the evening.

Oct. 8 – Go to work in the morning & make us a bunk and table, get brush for a Feather bed, & arrange all things comfortable & convenient. General news from Rosencrans quite favorable, Earnestly hope it may continue to be so.

Oct. 9 – Lay abed quite late in the morning. Doing nothing particular during the day, except reading “Caseys Tactics” which I find to be rather a dry study. Write a little to Chloe. Go on guard at retreat.

Oct. 10 – Was up nearly all night posting the reliefs, drew 5 days rations last night and have 8 days on hand from this morning. Get orders to pack up about 10 o’clock & moved out by Culpeper, and to the North West. Formed line of battle & had orders to put up our tents, prepare for the night.

Oct. 11 – Were waked up at 1 o’clock in the morning and after marching around two or three hours, came back to where e lay all night & then led off towards R - - k station, reached the river about 11 o’clock A.M. reached Bealton Station at 4 o’clock had orders to put up tents & fix for staying all night.

Oct. 12 – Lay at the Station til noon, then start back to the Rh - - k River & cross. Form line of battle and march back to B - - n Station & halt. Skirmishing & Arty. firing in advance. Bivouac in line & build fires, lie down to sleep.

Oct. 13 - Waked at 1 o’clock in the morning & recross the river, March back to Bealton Station. Turn to the left and go up the river to near Beverly Ford. Turn back at 9 o’clock and go a short distance turn to the left & cross the W - - n & W - - n junction R.R. Have a line of Flankers on each side, some skirmishing on each side, halt in a piece of woods and stay all night.

Oct. 14 – Start before light & move a short distance & form in line of battle just at sunrise. The rebs get almost in our rear and commence shelling us killing & wounding a few. The Bt-y soon silenced & taken, The Regt. Formed in skirmish line & received a terrible shelling from the rebs, 4<sup>th</sup> Brig. in the rear start back just in time to escape out of their line. They firing into our r - t flank fall back a couple of mi. & form skirmish line, but their infantry do not advance. March back to the Orange & Alex. R.R. & follow it back to near Bristow Station. Arty. firing commences in front of us. The rebs try to cut us off & a fight ensues in which they are drove back with the loss of two Regts. And two pieces of Arty. Are formed on the extreme left on the R.R. track, heavy skirmishing in the front but the rebs do not advance in force. Lay in line til 10 o’clock & then move off quietly and march to M.S. Junction & from there to Centreville. Stop at 4 o’clock in the morning.

Oct. 15 – Waked at 7 o’clock in the morning and formed in line in front of the heights of Centreville. Very glad to get where we can rest & have the rebs in front instead of being in our rear, on both flanks, and sometimes in front of us. Have marched 5 days and some of the time both day and night. Some Arty. firing and skirmishing but the rebs stop at dusk their Bt-y getting the worst of it.

Oct. 16 – Lowery in the morning, hear nothing of the rebs. The Brigade is formed in time & hear an order read from the Comd. Of the Army complimenting the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps for the good order in which they covered the retreat. We captured 5 pieces & 450 prisoners. At 2:00 witness the execution of a deserter belonging to the 11<sup>th</sup> P.V. Vols. Very hard shower in afternoon and evening.

Oct. 17 – Clear & pleasant. Hear a little Arty. firing in the direction of Throughfare Gap. Busy washing and cleaning up generally. The Cavalry went out a short distance just at night. On guard at night but only stay up til 10 o’clock. Then go to bed and leave the guard to post themselves. Bands are playing in the evening.

Oct. 18 – A beautiful Sabbath morning, are ordered to pack up the first thing in the morning. Lay all day waiting orders and ready to move at short notice. Rec. mail at night but I got none. Write one letter. Capt. Jones came to the Reg.

Oct. 19 – Waked before light & ordered to be ready to march at 6 o’clock. Rainy morning. March to Manassas & on beyond to Bristow Station. File off into the field & form in line of battle, a little Arty. firing towards Fainesville.

Oct. 20 – Started at daylight & marched towards Gainesville about 3 or 4 miles, then turned to the left and marched in the direction of W - - n but crooking around a great deal & fording a small stream 4 times. Stopped at 4 o’clock on the same spot where skirmishing and shelling took place on the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup>. Bivouac in line of battle.

Oct. 21 – Lay all day where we stopped last night. Busy reading, writing home, etc. Rations & Officers Baggage came up in the afternoon & we put up the A tent and took up quarters on the line Officers row.

Oct. 22 – Took a tramp after breakfast with two of the boys, tried to catch rabbits, quails and partridges but failed for want of dog & run. Have inspection at 10 o’clock & then write to M. Went on picket in afternoon & had a very pleasant time. The Corps gets orders to march at 7 o’clock tomorrow.

Oct. 23 – Are called in early & fall in with the Reg. A short distance from camp. March to the W – n & W – n Junction R.R. & go into camp in a very pleasant place. Put up tents and fix up as comfortably as possible, Commences to rain in the afternoon.

Oct. 24 – Busy all forenoon cleaning Gun. Rainy, cool day. Some of the Officers are building fireplaces in their quarters. Wild geese flying over, reminds us that winter is coming. Write to Chloe. Another week is gone never to return. So they pass away and will never return to us again.

Oct. 25 – In camp all day, have a quiet pleasant Sabbath once more. Writing, reading, etc. Rec. one letter from Chloe, and 1 from M. Rec. orders at night be at readiness to march at short notice.

Oct. 26 - Busy washing all the forenoon. Our overcoats came to us which were sent away at Falmouth. Rec. orders to be ready to get into line on 10 mi. notice. Hear a little Arty. firing and hear that the Cavl. are engaged. Some of the men return who were sent after the Drafted men.

Oct. 27 – In looking over the clothing account for 1863 find that I have drawn only \$11.53 (eleven dollars and fifty three cents) Rec'd a letter from Wilson and J. Stevens. Georg Stevens returned to the Regt. A little Arty. firing heard today, but lay quiet all day.

Oct. 28 – Washing in the forenoon. Nothing particular going in camp. Have inspection and dress parade at night. Have a pleasant and beautiful evening, and cool frosty night. But we do not notice the cold as we have plenty of blankets and overcoats.

Oct. 29 – Clear, pleasant morning. Drill at 9 o'clock 1 hour. Busy reading, talking, etc. during the forenoon. Lieut. Roberts and G. Stevens on picket. Sold Geo. Freemans dress coat to Asa Toombs for \$5.00, and a pair of pants to B.F. Burt for \$1.50. Have quite a time in the evening singing, but not a very large choir.

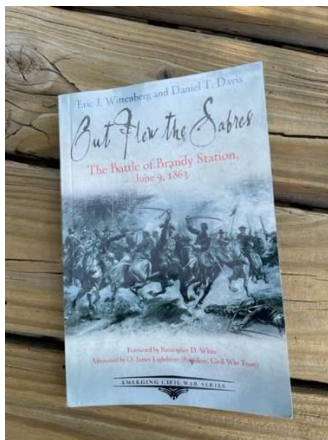
Oct. 30 – Have a very good night's rest last night. Almost all the forenoon grinding the Co's axe. Jason Stevens, Albert Evans, and George Barlow returned to the Co. At night we put up our shelter tent and 6 of us sleep in it. Some of the drafted men from Potter are brought into the 148<sup>th</sup> Regt.

Oct. 31 – Very rainy morning. Have orders to fall in for inspection at 8 o'clock and be ready for mustering. Go on picket in the afternoon, get a good post with plenty of wood & keep a good fire all night. Rec. the Examiner at night of which I am very glad as I have missed one or two numbers. A very cool windy night.

## **BOOK REVIEW: OUT FLEW THE SABRES – THE BATTLE OF BRANDY STATION JUNE 9, 1863**

*Author: Eric F. Wittenberg and Daniel T. Davis*

Reviewed by Mike Espenshade



Paperback; 2016; Savas Beatie Publishing; Part of the Emerging Civil War Series; 139 pp.; 45 pictures and maps, Driving Tour Guide, and Order of Battle; 0 pp notes, 0 pp bibliography, 0 pp index. Free from a friend of Pete Zinkus.

Yet another very good work by Civil War cavalry expert Eric Wittenberg, and now, Daniel Davis.

On June 8, 1863, in the broad plain just west of Brandy Station, JEB Stuart held an impressive pageantry of review of his 14,500 cavalry force for dignitaries and Gen R. E. Lee. Early the next morning, Union Cavalry surprised Stuart by crossing in great force across the Rappahannock River.

Fourteen hours later, 12,000 Union cavalymen had battled to a virtual standstill 9,000 of their supposedly unbeatable Confederate counterparts – with 3,000 Union infantry added for good measure. Swirling clashes among thousands of mounted warriors, stone fence defenses, artillery spewing canister into onrushing cavalry charges, wooded fighting, hand-to-hand fighting, across the rolling hills of Culpeper County, VA. Both sides had suffered heavy losses.

Stuart's key brigade/division leaders were at their aggressive best this day as Stuart also masterfully managed his outnumbered forces. Union cavalymen had fought skillfully and courageously, winning several areas of the battlefield and smaller actions through the day. However, late in the day, Union commander Alfred Pleasanton's timid call-off/poor support of Buford's Division's hard-won position at Fleetwood Hill appeared to save Stuart from an embarrassing defeat only hours after his big review show. The Federals carefully withdrew back again across the river.

Stuart's victory at Brandy Station prevented the Union cavalry from detecting the Confederate infantry massing near Culpeper for their invasion of PA. Gen Ewell's corps left on their march north the next day, June 10, 1863.

The reader gets a clear understanding of how this battle showed that the Union Cavalry forces were vastly improved and able to match, if not defeat, their vaunted Southern foe. This was also revealed in the Confederate accounts of the action.

### **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 "Late For Roll Call".



### **GEORGE SPANGLER FARM**

The Gettysburg Foundation opens up the George Spangler Farm to site visits from time to time and I recently got to visit the site for the 1<sup>st</sup> time. The site became the XI corps field hospital on 1 July 1863. The II corps field hospital bordered it on the north along the Granite Schoolhouse Road.

The farm dates back to the early 1800s. George Spangler bought the farm in 1848 and lived there with his wife and 4 children. The farm had horse, cows, pigs, and sheep and they grew corn, wheat, potatoes, etc. The site was near the center of the Federal line and between the Baltimore Pike and Taneytown Road making getting supplies into and out of more feasible.

It was an 80 acre farm turned into a field hospital where nearly 2,000 men were treated and where Confederate General Lewis Armistead died (possibly in the summer kitchen). Armistead's injuries (namely to the armpit and knee) were not considered life threatening, so when he did die, that fact somewhat puzzled the surgeons posted at the site. Gen. Francis Barlow also was treated at the field hospital after being injured on 1 July at Blocher's Knoll (known more commonly now called Barlow's Knoll).

During the battle on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of July, the farm was on the receiving end of on and off Confederate artillery and the surgeons, and those being treated there, were afraid of either the barn being set ablaze by the shells or the men actually getting hit by them.

Normally when the site is open, various civilian, medical, and infantry living history displays are also going on and you can wander the site. The Spangler home itself is not open to the public and is currently only used by the Gettysburg Foundation for staff training and events.

Due to shelling during the Confederate barrage that led up to Longstreet's assault on 3 July 1863 nearly striking Gen. Meade's HQs, he ended up moving his HQs just northeast of the George Spangler farm near Powers Hill.







## UPCOMING EVENTS

On 8~10 Sept. is the “Thunder on the Gauley” event in Summersville, WV (Carnifax Ferry Battlefield). It is an NR MAX Effort event. Stay tuned to the NR Facebook page and email for more updates as we get closer. If you plan to attend, please let Eric know ASAP as the NR needs unit numbers NOW.

On 14~15 Oct. is the annual USAHEC event in Carlisle. It is our only paid event so it is important that everyone attend since payment requires a minimum number of attendees. We get paid more if we are present on Sunday as well. It is an easy, laid-back event where we talk to the public and can wander the site and see all of the various eras of US military in action. The schedule has not yet been released yet so I don't know if we will be doing a demo or not, but we will likely, at least, be doing some drill. More info TBA as we get closer to the event.

## 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 83<sup>rd</sup> PVI, is selling off most of his CW gear. You can contact him directly at: [grumpydave58@comcast.net](mailto: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](mailto:n3ntj@outlook.com)

(3.) Kerry Williard is handling the sale of Dave Swigert items for Dave's wife. Marc and I assembled an inventory list with approximate values. Some items remain. The list is current as of 21 July 2023. Contact Kerry directly with any and all inquiries: [shamokin71@aol.com](mailto:shamokin71@aol.com) (see the updated list below)

Quantity	Item Description	Detailed Description	Selling Price
<b>Armaments</b>			
1	1861 Springfield Rifle - Armi Sport		\$900.00
<b>Uniform Clothing</b>			
1	Trouser - Steel Blue each with suspendors	34 min waist/27" inseam-avg. condx and a little dirt w/ braces no watch pck	\$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
<b>Accoutrements</b>			
1	Scabbord -Late war 7 Rivet		\$15.00
1	Gum Blanket	some cracking with oversized grommets	\$20.00
1	Haversack - Tarred Black - Brittle Strap w/opwn seam		\$5.00
<b>Misc Items</b>			
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 (POSoFA) 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  
~~28-30 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 53<sup>rd</sup> PVI and/or the National Regiment (links below) and check your email on a regular basis

### **53rd PVI Contacts**

President: Eric Ford ([reenactor53@gmail.com](mailto:reenactor53@gmail.com))  
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53<sup>rd</sup> PVI Website: <http://www.53rdpvi.org>  
2023 Field Officers - Sergeants: Mark Fasnacht (1<sup>st</sup> Sgt), Marc Benedict, Matthew Steger  
Corporals: Mike Espenshade & Michael Brumbaugh  
53rd PVI Facebook Page: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/53rdPVI>  
National Regiment Phone line: 800-777-1861 (code 61)  
National Regiment Website: <https://www.thenationalregiment.com>  
National Regiment Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/842904089142263>

