

53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry

Company C

"The Sentinel" March 2018

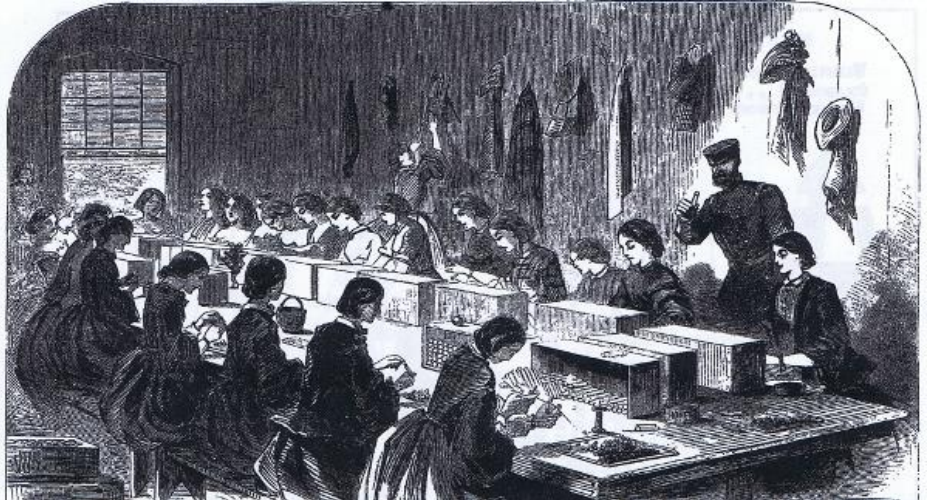
Newsletter of The James Creek Guards



"Clubs Are Trump!"

This Month:

1. Winter Drill Photos
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(etching of a period cartridge rolling factory.. not quite the 53rd cartridge rolling party)

I am always looking for newsletter content, so please forward your articles, book reviews, photos, stories, etc. and your "Get To Know Your Pard" profile (if you have not done so already) to me for inclusion in a future edition of "The Sentinel". – Matthew Steger, editor

Winter Drill Photos – (photos taken by Eric Ford unless otherwise noted)



Photo taken by Landis Valley Museum and also posted on their Facebook page

"The Sentinel" The newsletter of the 53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry

53rd
Pennsylvania
Volunteer Infantry
Company "C"
Inc.



The men of the 53rd taking a break from drill.

It appears that Sgt. Benedict is trying to tell me something.



Taking a break from drill.

Our sleeping quarters Saturday night.



Photo supplied by Mike Espenshade showing our quarters and the adjacent smoke house.



This one has to be captioned **“3 guys looking to get into trouble.”**



The Civil War Letters of Levi J. Fritz

(thank you to Rich Sauers for providing this series)

[Note – any grammatical and typographical errors were kept intact as they are original to the letter - editor]

Levi J. Fritz served in Company A, 53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry. He enlisted in 1861 and was mustered out with the regiment in July 1865. During the course of the first three years of the conflict, Fritz wrote a number of lengthy missives to the *Montgomery Ledger*, a Pottstown newspaper.

Camp 53d Reg't. P.V.
Fairfax Co., Virginia
Friday Eve., Nov. 29.

Messrs. Editors--Since writing my last I have another opportunity of sending you another letter in time for the next week's paper. Just as the beams of the sun were beginning to peep over the eastern hills on the morn of Thursday last, the boys of the 53d drew the stakes of their tents at Camp brooke, and ere many moments had passed, were safely stowed away in the baggage wagons. As there was a sufficient number of wagons for the purpose we were not compelled to carry the heavy knapsacks, which was quite a relief to the men on a march. About nine o'clock the regiment commenced to move, and marching down to and through Washington, passed over the Long Bridge about ten o'clock. I had gone to Washington in advance of the regiment, and while waiting at the bridge for it to come up, I observed, in the short space of an hour, six regiments march over. These, as near as I can recollect, were the 61st New York, 36th penna., 4th Rhode Island, 14th Mass. and the 5th New Hampshire. The scene around the Long Bridge is one of the most busy ever gazed upon. Train after train of baggage wagons, ambulances, suttlers' teams, cabs, carts, cavalry, artillery, infantry, in one long endless throng are constantly passing to and fro over this narrow but lengthy means of passage to Jeff's utopian Confederacy. The guards at the bridge have a troublesome time of it. As we came from Camp Brooke to the city we noticed that the 93d, Col. McCarter's regiment had struck their tents, and are, by this time, no doubt, on this side of the Potomac. I understand that the 96th, Col. Cake, and the 104th, Col. Davis, have also moved to a more Secesh latitude.

After we had passed over the river, we proceeded onward towards Alexandria. The weather was very pleasant and if the road had not been so very muddy, we could have appreciated our tramp much better. We recollect well when we passed over this same road last summer, in the memorable three months' campaign. Along the route we noticed many old landmarks, and, thanks to the enterprise of Gen. McClellan, we had the pleasure of viewing many very bulldogish looking new ones. Immediately preceding our regiment was the 4th Rhode Island, while closely hugging our rear followed the 5th New Hampshire. We passed through Alexandria at midday, and marching down to the depot of the Alexandria and Orange Railway, we were halted. Just before arriving at the depot we filed past Col. McClane's regiment (88th) on dress parade. This regiment is performing the arduous duty of guarding the city; the boys don't like it much as it gives them no opportunity of drilling. We laid at the depot an hour or so patiently waiting for a train to convey us to Springfield Station seven miles up the road. About 2 o'clock the orders for us to go to

Springfield were countermanded, and the regiment was marched several miles beyond Alexandria, on a hill. Our baggage train coming up immediately we hastily pitched our tents for the night. We cut down a number of cedar trees, and temporarily carpeted our tents with the twigs, over which we spread our blankets and bunked in for the night. We were more fortunate than several of the other regiments in bivouac near us. Their tents did not come up until morning and they were compelled to make the best of a rainy night without shelter. At noon to-day we struck tents again and proceeded to our present camp, under the guidance of Gen. Sumner, our division commander. It did not take our boys a long time to have their moving town of houses a la militaire in a condition to be tenanted. Our camp is in a field along the line of the Alexandria & Orange Railroad, about two miles and a half above the city.

Previous to pitching

our tents one of the most amusing scenes ever I witnessed transpired. Around the field was a very neat fence of good boards. The boys anxiously eyed them: and, as the saying is, "their eyes watered to get hold of them," for bedding purposes. On it being intimated that there would be no objections to their "pitching in," a grand rush was made, and in less than fifteen minutes, perhaps a mile of fence disappeared before the vigorous and not-to-be-resisted attack of the 53d boys. Not a single post remained to commemorate this gallant charge on the fence. The boys are in good spirits. We are now within a few hours march of the enemy, and if anything like a fight is on the tapis we expect to have a hand in the affair.

Yours &c., L.J.F.

[*Ledger*, December 3, 1861]

National Regiment's School Of Instruction Summary –

Over the weekend of Feb. 17/18th, the National Regiment held their annual School of Instruction in Gettysburg. Sgt. Marc Benedict and I (your editor) attended on behalf of the 53rd. There were presentations on various topics including tentage, rations, weapon cleaning in the field, medallions, event security, guard mount, etc.

Due to what has occurred at some events in 2017, security is becoming a major concern and because of that, guard mount is going to be a more important issue in the future at large and even smaller events. How the National Regiment handled the situation at the 153rd Cedar Creek event made it clear to area law enforcement that we have a demonstrated and proven military leadership structure. This strong military setup is what allowed the NR to shine when things went down in October. This situation only goes to prove that our members must adhere to and obey commands of our NCOs and Officers.

In order to protect ourselves and those attending our events, all members will need to keep a close eye on the goings-on around us will be needed for everyone's safety. One way of doing this will be guard mount. The Officer of the Guard, Sgt. of the Guard, and the Corporals will play the leadership role in guard mount and camp safety. Things as simple as performing roll call on a regular basis during larger events will become the norm. It is already a requirement in our new insurance policy that we do not allow civilians to handle our weapons; it is also an important idea when thinking about camp safety. It will be on the officers and NCOs to remind all military attendees to not allow camp visitors (the public, that is), to handle our weapons. I often see members letting the public briefly handle our weapons (even with us keeping 2 hands on the weapon) because they ask 'how heavy is your musket?'. **It is very prudent that we stop allowing the public to touch or otherwise handle our weapons for various reasons.** Our NCOs will need to remind our privates of this policy. When the need arises, we must simply let the public know that we can not allow them to handle or touch our weapons. When we are out in the field doing a demonstration (maneuvering, firing, etc.), we also need to keep someone in camp to watch the public that may be hanging around (after we leave camp) to make sure that nobody leaves anything in one of our tents, for example. Leaving at least one member behind in camp is also an insurance requirement when a camp fire exists.

For larger NR events, the safety/security will be handled by the NR leadership working with local law enforcement and EMS. For smaller events not on NPS property, safety/security will be on the unit members, namely the NCOs.

As mentioned above, guard mount will become a more regular thing for future events (large ones and even smaller living history events). Since guard mount has not been a normal occurrence for events, the NCOs will need to practice this with the privates so we are all familiar with the specifics of how guard mount is properly done. For those of you that attended Landis Valley in July 2017, the 53rd did post guards during public hours but this was to encourage the public to enter camp and make them aware of the event schedule. In the future, guard mount will become the norm, thus returning to its original purpose (camp safety and security). This is why it is important for 53rd members to attend events this spring and summer in order to become more familiar with the guard mount process.

In future issues of "The Sentinel", I will be including information from the various sessions held during the NR School. Of course, Marc and I will also be discussing and demonstrating the things covered at the NR School at future events.

Rations and Foraging – (Warren Stevens, 14th CT)

At the NR School, Warren Stevens of the 14th CT presented on "Rations and Foraging – Improving Your Impression). He discussed how canning and food preservation was becoming popular before the Civil War (namely in the first few decades of the 1800s). Obviously, this made feeding the Federal Army a bit easier during the Civil War. Warren also showed a few early can opener tools as well.

Besides the issued rations, soldiers supplemented their food with sutler purchases and from what family and friends sent from home such as canned chicken, candy, cookies, etc. Soft bread was an issue item at times and it is known that pancakes were sometimes made as well. Condensed milk was a favorite item although expensive.

Desiccated vegetables were a mix of shredded vegetables pressed into large cubes. Unpopular with troops, they often arrived spoiled and sometimes were only smoked or spread onto muddle company streets. Cans were constructed of tinned sheet metal and had a unique design for the time. Can openers or knives were used to open the cans. Any many of period food was canned including meat, fish, fruit, vegetables, etc.

Initially, foraging was carefully managed with orders for carrying it out but this didn't last long. Original accounts state that Union troops confiscated all sorts of food, livestock, crops, tobacco, wagons, and other personally owned property. Smoked meat, beef, and hams are mentioned as well as bee hives for honey. Federal troops also supplemented their rations issue with occasion hunting and fishing. Fields, farms, and forests supplied the armies and deer, turkeys, and even alligator meat (or as some in the 53rd call it, "chicken") is mentioned as being consumed by troops.

For present day re-enactors, the above food and rations can be easily incorporated into your portrayal without a lot of effort. Coffee, raw brown sugar, and hardtack should be at the top of the list. Soldiers were also issued vegetables, roasted beans, and even ground coffee at times. Coffee mills were used by company cooks to provide soldiers with ground coffee. Warren Stevens also showed a period example of a small coffee grinder. Soldiers also used discarded boxes, cans, and other trash to make their camp life better. Cans especially were turned into all sorts of devices, including graders for coffee, hardtack, etc.

Modern canned goods can be rewrapped in period-correct labels. Sullivan Press sells a label disc that can be used to make period correct canned food labels fairly easily by cutting the new (period-correct) labels to size and adhering to the modern can with a glue stick. Smooth modern cans are preferred.

Meat was eaten by the men on a semi-regular basis especially when foraging brought in cows. Smoked hams and roasted chicken were sent from home. We should consider incorporating these into our unit events. Remember, however, that more men died of disease than battle wounds, so food safety is a must to make sure everyone 'survives' the weekend event. A period-correct ammo box can easily be converted into a make-shift cooler by using some rigid foam inside the box with a freezer pack, for example. Information on Ammunition Packing Crates can be found in the 1861 Ordinance Manual if you'd like to make your own.

Swap & Shop –

This is a new feature I figured I'd try. Should you be looking for something specific for your CW kit or have an item to sell or trade, forward the info to me and I will include it:

For Sale: 'Great Coat' made from Hellen and Dave's Smithsonian Pattern. I wore it two times. It would fit someone larger than me! Asking \$25.00 plus UPS shipping. It is literally 'Brand New'. Size is b/w Small and Medium. When I put it on you can't see me! Contact Marlin - yankeeprof@windstream.net

Wanted - Leathers and mainly a cartridge box if anyone has anything available. Contact Alec pntbl1499@hotmail.com

"Get To Know Your Pard" – LOOKING FOR RESPONDENTS!

I have run this segment in the past, but am long out of summited profiles. Many 53rd members have yet to forward their profiles to me for inclusion in a future edition of "The Sentinel". Please take some time to answer the below questions (or some up with some of your own) and forward your info to me. We're not trying to pry into your lives, but simply learn a little more about each 53rd PVI member. This also helps some of the newer members learn about our more seasoned members. If you have not done so yet, please take a few minutes to copy and paste the below questions into a separate email and respond to me with your answers, if you have more preferred questions, you can choose your own questions to answer... Thank you!

10 Questions:

- 1. Where were you born?**
- 2. How long have you been re-enacting?**
- 3. What is your favorite part of the hobby?**
- 4. What was the first Civil War-related kit item that you bought?**
- 5. Have you ever taken part of a Civil War movie , TV, or other production?**
- 6. Do you have a favorite or most memorable CW event?**
- 7. Do you have any other non-Civil War hobbies?**
- 8. Do you have a Civil War photo (wet-plate or tin-type image) to share?**
- 9. What do you do (or did you do, if retired) for a living?**
- 10. Favorite Saying?**

A word from our president.....

Gentlemen,

As I mentioned at the winter drill, registration for Burkittsville is open. I suggested that we register as a group before the fee increases on April 1. The current registration fee is \$25. Please forward you checks to Pat Rose ASAP [Pat's contact info is at the end of the newsletter – editor]. I will be asking Pat to send our registration to the event organizers by March 20. If you miss that date, you'll be responsible for registering yourself.

Nick Grimm forwarded an email to me a couple of weeks ago regarding a local one day event in Berks County. Please see the email below for the details. I'm not suggesting that we add this to our official schedule because it's full enough already. Due to the fact that it's close to home and only a single day, I'm presenting to you all for individual consideration. Keep in mind that the week prior is our event Wilson's Warf in support of ELF Co. Please do not let this event impact your participation at Wilson's Warf. If you wish to attend this event, please let me know no later than April 15th so I can contact the organizer with details regarding our participation.

I am with the 51st Patriot Days Encampment, which is held June 8th, 9th, and 10th at the Daniel Boone Homestead in Birdsboro, Berks County Pa. This is a youth camping event which includes Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, American Heritage Girls, and Campfire USA and other youth organizations.

This year besides Revolutionary War era displays, we are having displays from other periods in United States history. We would like to invite your unit to put up a display about the Civil War. The display will only be on Saturday June 9th, from approximately 9 am to 5 pm.

If you are unable to do this, could you recommend another unit that may be able to. If you have any questions please contact me.

I look forward to seeing you all soon. THINK SPRING!!

Eric

Upcoming events -

Cartridge Rolling Party –

3 March 2018 – Sgt. Fasnacht's Home (Kleinfeltersville)

As in prior years, we will meet to roll cartridges for the upcoming season. Feel free to bring scissors, glue sticks, rolling tools, etc. as well as something to share for lunch. Please let Mark know ahead of time if you plan on attending and what you will be bringing; Mark will have brats and chili available. You can start showing up as early as 9AM.

“Adopt A Position” Monument Cleanup –

7 April 2018 – 53rd PVI Monument (Gettysburg NPS)

Bring your rakes, loupers, gloves, etc. for our bi-annual cleanup of our monument on Brooks Ave. Please arrive before 10AM. If we get sufficient help, detail should be complete by noon.

Gettysburg Living History –

21 – 22 April – PA Monument (Gettysburg NPS)

Living history event with our ELF friends at the PA Monument. Bring your normal kit, rounds, tentage, food, etc. and items to show the public. Arrive by 8AM on Sat. Updates on the event schedule will be forthcoming as we get closer to the event.

2018 Calendar of Events -

~~13 January – Holiday Party – Gettysburg~~

~~3 February – Winter Drill (Landis Valley) – Lancaster~~

~~17 – 18 February – National Regiment “School Of Instruction” – Gettysburg~~

3 March – Cartridge Rolling Party – Kleinfeltersville

7 April – Spring Adopt-A-Position (Monument Cleanup) – Gettysburg NMP

21 – 22 April – Living History – Gettysburg NMP

19 – 20 May – USAHEC – Carlisle, PA (Paid Event)

19 – 20 May – New Market Re-enactment – NR Max Effort

28 May – Memorial Day Parade – Hummelstown

2 – 3 June – Wilson's Wharf – Ft. Pocahontas Charles City, VA (ELF)

5 – 8 July – 155th Gettysburg Re-enactment – Gettysburg NMP

22 July – Gruber Wagon Works – Reading

28 – 29 July – Landis Valley – Lancaster

11 – 12 August – Cedar Mountain LH (1st MN)

7 – 9 September – 155th South Mountain – Burkittsville, MD (NR Max Effort)

6 – 7 October – Living History – Gettysburg NMP

3 November – Fall Adopt-A-Position (Monument Cleanup) – Gettysburg NMP

17 November – Remembrance Day Parade – Gettysburg

1 December – Annual Meeting



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