



Company C 53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry

"The Sentinel" October 2018

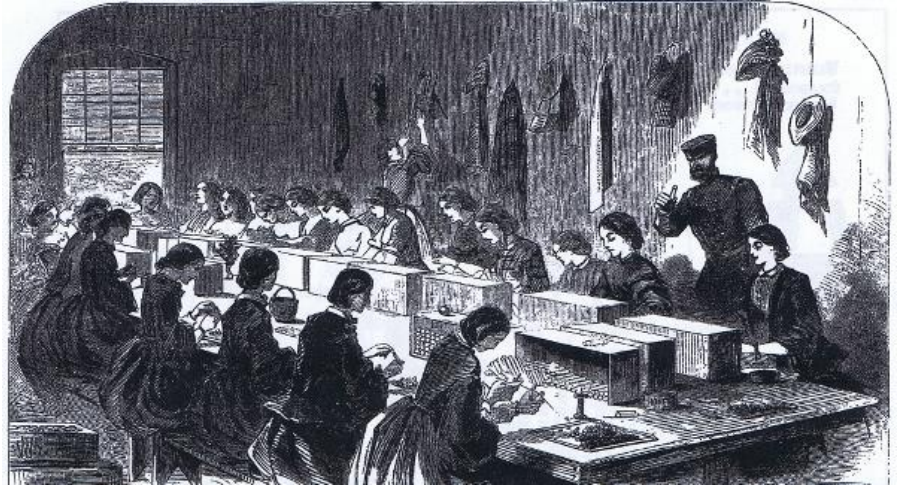
Newsletter of The James Creek Guards



"Clubs Are Trump!"

This Month:

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A different type of '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

Bored on Guard Duty? How Is That Event Possible? by [The Jersey Gallinipper](#) (reprinted with permission)



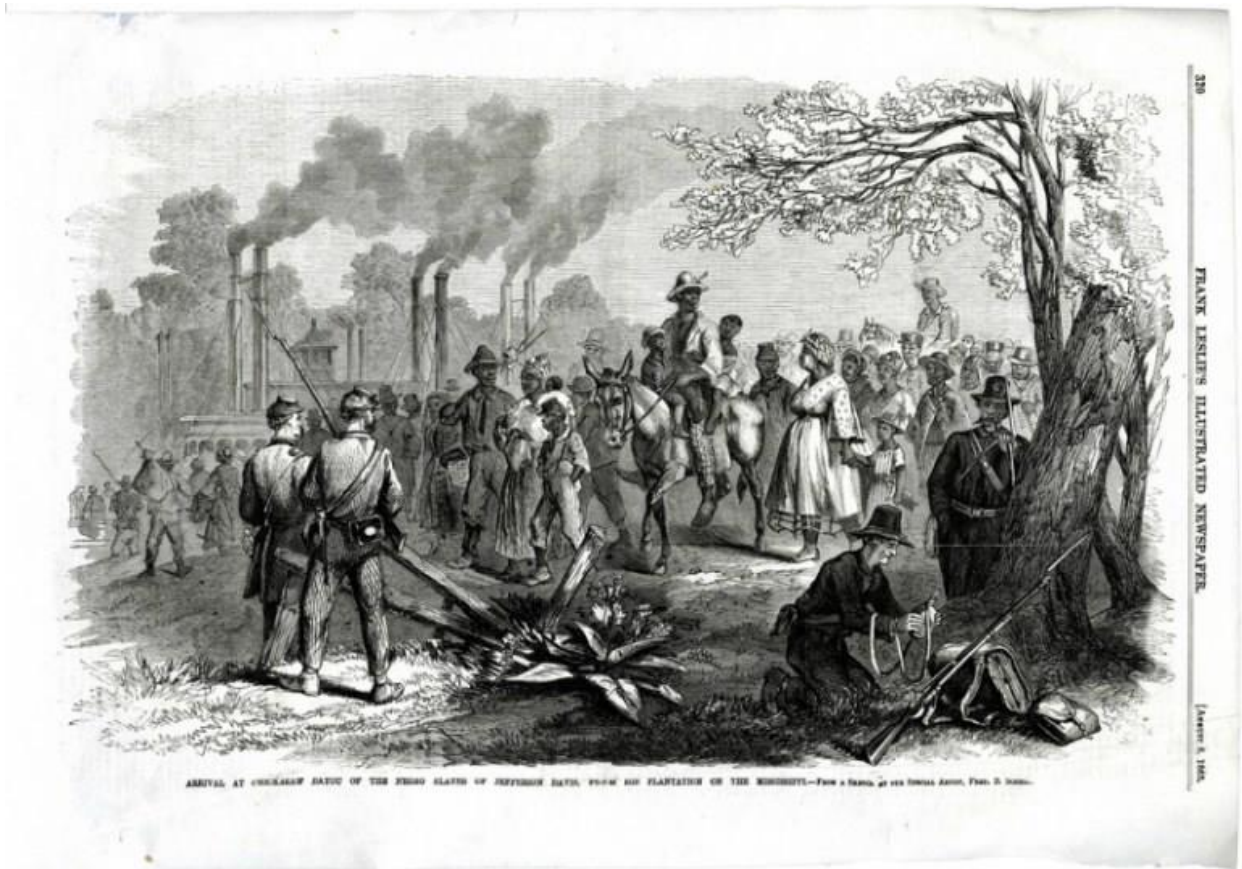
(due to the 53rd PVI and National Regiment integrating guard mount more and more into our events because to recent outside issues, these articles seem very timely. This is part 2 of the series – editor)

OK, guard duty might sometimes have been tedious in 1863, but face it, we don't go to events to be bored. We go to recreate the appearance of a unit of the times. The traditional responsibilities of being a sentry, the social mores of the time, and the presence of both period civilians and modern spectators at events

could combine to keep a guard company jumping. And it's a welcome change, for some fellows, from sitting around listening to modern gossip.

Let's look at the duties of a typical camp sentry. He's got two responsibilities, general orders for any sentry plus orders that specifically apply to his post or to his circumstances, or both.

General orders, paraphrased from the regulations: Sentries are responsible for all public property in view. They are required to salute all officers who are passing by. They are to give an alarm in case of fire, the approach of an enemy, or any disturbance whatsoever. They are to report all violations of the articles of war, army regulations or of camp or garrison orders. At night, they challenge anyone approaching the post and allow no one who doesn't know the countersign to pass until they are examined by an officer or noncommissioned officer of the guard.



How would you like to be this sentry, faced with an avalanche of humanity in the wake of the Emancipation Proclamation?

Pretty simple, but there's a lot going on in there. For instance, you now know what the countersign does: It's a secret word that gets you past the sentry. Unit commanders can decide if that's necessary just for people coming in, or for people both coming and going (in a real army, not everyone is allowed to just leave camp whenever they want to go to the sutlers or whatever). The countersign is issued by the regimental brass each day and made known to the men in the guard. Made known quietly. Just as sentries going off duty quietly convey the post's special orders, the countersign is made known quietly. Think about it. Bellowing out the countersign as the relief is formed up in your Sunday preacher voice is just not smart. You've just broken the usefulness of a valuable tool.

(if a soldier passed the countersign to someone outside the organization or even worse, to the enemy, he could be subject to court martial or death – editor)

Meanwhile, saluting. I think "later" for that. It can get complicated. You need one of those arm sleeves that quarterbacks use with all the play calls on them.

Special orders are where we can stave off boredom and make ourselves useful.

There are special orders for guarding the commissary and quartermaster stores, and special orders for guarding any prisoners. There can also be special orders for various circumstances, like civilians who want to come into camp. Clearly, based on accounts, sometimes this was a big deal, sometimes not. However, since we need gainful employment as sentries, regimental brass can issue a special order that "our" civilians, the ones in period civilian attire, must be challenged and questioned about their business before being admitted to camp, any time, day or night. There could also be a stipulation that no woman can enter camp without a male escort; if she doesn't have a civilian man with her, the corporal of the guard must be summoned — ("Corporal of the Guard! Post number _____! Escort required!") and the corporal of the guard grabs someone from the relief that is under arms, and takes that person to the post to escort the lady either through the camp or to her destination within the camp. Units that know their period etiquette already routinely do this. It is the intersection of civilian etiquette with military procedure.

Then there are spectators, and here we need to use good judgment. We are the reason they are present, and there's no sense acting the brute. We are big guys with pointy things on our muskets; what's fun and games for us can scare others, like little kids, or spark an unwanted response from someone who perceives and resents the threat. But there's also an opportunity. Because not all of them just want to see the battle. Some want to know more. And some of them are ripe for recruitment.

In this scenario you just ask them to hold up a moment, then sound out "Corporal of the guard! Post number _____! *Spectator* escort required!" Then the corporal trots out again, accompanied this time not by just anyone, but by the soldier every unit has who just wants to talk spectator ears right off their heads. The spectators then get a walking tour through camp, with chapter, verse and footnotes on what just happened, why there were camp sentries, how the camp is laid out, what we had for breakfast, how the regiment is organized, what the weather was on this date in 1864, the whole panoply of pomp and circumstance and sweaty wool. We educate and inform. We have fun. We don't get bored.



CHALLENGING

The challenge itself is literally shaped by the military technology of the times.

If ordered to challenge everyone – at night, by default, but also during the day if that's the order – camp sentinels come to port arms and call out. "Halt! Who comes there?!" Loud and clear. You do it when the approaching party is close enough to shoot but too far away to rush you without you getting a shot off. If they answer "Friends!" you then tell them "Advance one with the countersign." Just one, you see, so you aren't outnumbered in close quarters. You keep the weapon at arms port, both hands on

it securely, because the approaching stranger has to get close enough to you to quietly convey the countersign, which means he's close enough to grab your weapon. If they don't have the countersign, you have to call the corporal of the guard, because you lack the authority to let them pass.

The other "secret word" (really, shades of Groucho Marx) is the parole. This is the word used by the officers who have the right to make the rounds of the guard posts for their own purposes, usually to check the effectiveness of the positioning.

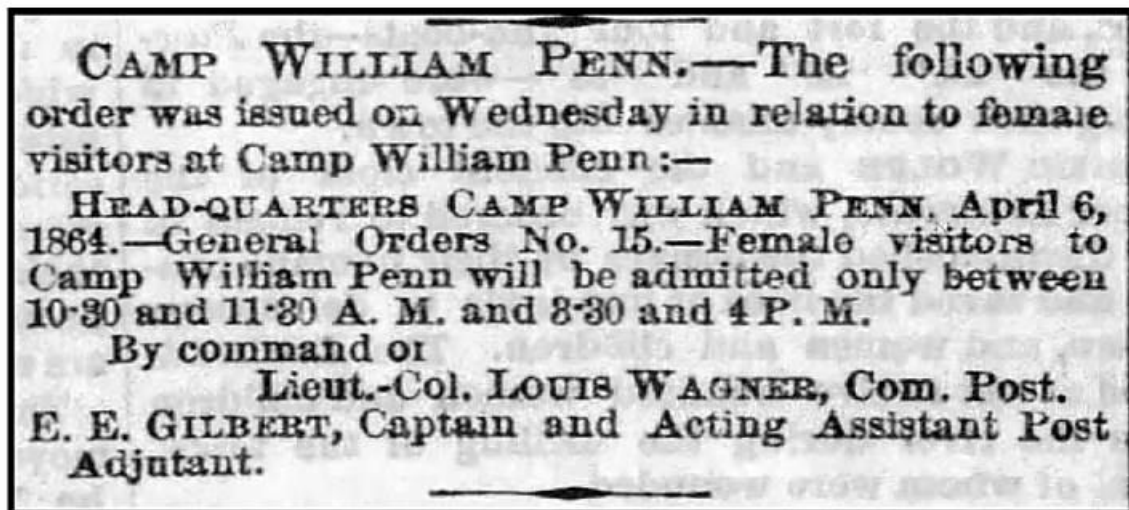
The manuals call for sentinels to have fixed bayonets. That is partly simply to indicate to everyone that the soldier is on guard duty – it's a visual signal.

Detail: Post number one is usually the commanding officer's tent, and that sentinel has the added special duty of letting the CO know when there's something going on he should know about.

So that's the basics, calling for one sentinel per post. However, there seems to be no reason why a particularly busy post, like the one on the main entrance to a camp, couldn't have more than one sentinel, especially for a spectator-heavy reenactment. The extras would simply mean there's no need to call the corporal out for every spectator escort. Alternatively, the guard mount headquarters could be adjacent to that busy post. Just as you can alter your camp layout to suit the terrain available, you can alter your guard mount to meet the situation you face.

Next time: Outpost, which is guard duty on steroids and EVEN MORE FUN!

Here's your period newspaper clip. It's possible this limitation was designed to minimize and concentrate the burden of escorting female visitors. Just speculation, folks.



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.

Headquarters, 53d Regt., P.V.

Camp California, Va., Saturday, Feb. 8th, 1862.

Messrs. Editors:--Lieut. John F. Potts of Company A was early last month detached from the regiment to act as signal officer, and ordered to report himself at the Signal Camp of Instruction at Georgetown Heights. He proceeded to Washington and from thence to the signal camp. He had barely time to report himself to the proper officers when he was taken ill. He came back to Washington, where for a month past, he has been confined to bed by typhoid fever. A few days ago he was well enough to leave for home on furlough. While on special duty as signal officer he ranks as, and receives the pay of a captain of cavalry. Lieut. Potts is one of the most promising officers of the regiment; open hearted and generous almost to a fault, he is loved not only by the members of his company, but by all. We earnestly hope for his speedy recovery.

Last Monday evening orders came for the regiment to go on picket, to prepare to march at 9 o'clock the following morning. Four days rations were immediately issued from the Commissary, and the cooks were engaged until midnight in preparing and serving out each man's grub. On Tuesday morning the regiment was drawn up in line of battle. An inspection by the Colonel showed that the boys were fully equipped and prepared for a four day's picketing bivouac on the Edsell's Hill outpost. The regiment was marched up the Alexandria and Orange R.R. a distance of three miles. This route is somewhat nearer and much better traveling than the road, which the mud has made almost impossible. After halting on the hill the N.Y. regiment on duty was relieved, and the 53d took their places. Somewhat more comfortable quarters have been prepared for the pickets since we were here last--during the memorable holidays of '61. Nothing unusual has occurred during the picketing. The weather and the roads forbid an attack of the enemy, while an advance of our forces is improbable during the continuance of this inclement spell. This regiment will arrive in camp this afternoon. The boys will no doubt feel like resting after days arduous and exciting duty.

A vast amount of wood is consumed daily by the regiment. Every tent has a stove or furnace within; these must all be supplied with wood. A large quantity is used for cooking purposes. In order to keep ourselves warm and to cook our food, for one day only, fifteen cords of wood are required. A number of men are detailed every morning who proceed to the woods and exercise themselves at felling and cutting up trees, until they have secured a sufficient quantity. Teams are then sent out, and the wood hauled in and divided amongst the different companies, staff, hospital &c.

The 8th Illinois Cavalry, whose camp is next to ours on the side toward Alexandria, have moved to town, until the present unhealthy season breaks up. When this splendid regiment pitched their tents on this side, there was not half dozen men in the hospital. Now more than three hundred are on the sick list and over 20 have died.

While on picket, some of the boys went to a house near by, to get a little milk for a sick person. After some coaxing about a gill was procured by paying twelve cents. The boys being of the opinion that milk could be got cheaper than that, got up the next morning about an hour before sunrise, and, notwithstanding the fact that it was dark, managed to reach the place where the cows were, and at once commenced to draw milk without money and without price. One fellow after fingering around one of the animals for some time, cries out, "Jim, I can't milk this thing." "Why not?" "Why it's a bull!"

L.J.F.

[*Ledger*, February 11, 1862] Headquarters, 53d Regt., P.V.

Original 53rd PVI Veteran headstones – (submitted by Marc Benedict)

Sergt. Evan Jonas Fryer, Co. A.

Born in 1842. Enlisted for 3 years in 1861.
Died Jan. 9, 1892.



Pvt. Latta C. Detwiler, Co. A.

Born 1842. Died 1901.



Corpl. Frederick Boyer, Co. A.

Born 1812. Aged 49 at enlistment for 3 years in 1861.
Died in 1877.



Pvt. John H. Boyer, Co. A.

Born 1840. Enlisted for 3 years in 1861. Died in 1912. Initially enlisted in the 3rd PVI Co. D, then re-enlisted in the 53rd Co. A.



Pvt. Bradford Wallace, Co. A.

Born in 1847. Enlisted for 3 years in 1864. Wounded April 2, 1865. Died April 22, 1926.



Summary of the Burkittsville Event
(by Mark Fasnacht)

As you know, rain is the main event these days....and it did not let us down at this Burkittsville weekend.

Friday, during the day, the rain held off and missing us, only surrounding us with colorful bolts of lightning and interesting cloud formations. It was at dusk when the rain caught up with us and sent us heels over tin cups to our tents. We did what soldiers do and kept our powder (and other things) dry as we could.

The rain seemed to activate Vincent's brigade in the rainy night the way Sea Monkeys are activated by mysterious powders. 21st century vehicles appeared in company streets and the magic of the 19th century and the sound of the rain was drowned out by the whooping and roaring by the imbibed hoard who made the same sins of the Irish brigade seem like choir boy acts of frivolity. After many hours the noise of these vagrants hit a crescendo and died with the rain. Peace came for the rest of the night and rest ...to those that could get it.

Saturday morning started with high hopes. Mother nature again teased us with a temporary truce of cooperation. Still no rain. 5th company was leisurely able wake to partake it a good fire made breakfast with delicious coffee from a mega-pot. On to Dress Parade and then some time to practice Skirmish drill and "By Company" and "By File" into line.

A nice rest period before the shuttling of the troops to the town happened with some choosing to tour the Shafer House (Franklin's Headquarters).

Unfortunately, the rain schedule and the NR schedule ended up conflicting at the worst time and just before the moment of truth to head towards the Johnnie foe the heavens parted and reminded us of what we have all been getting used to. The Staff became indecisive and the boys hunkered in their canvas for cover. Finally, after an indeterminable time the decision was made to shuttle the boys to a staging area east of town. A decision would be made there. As we gathered under an old shed like wet cats on a sinking ship we noticed quite a number of "foreign observers" with the staff. They soon came over to us (the wet cats) and with enthusiastic glee they informed us they were a film crew from Vietnam and they were all wet with excitement to watch and film us in our blue uniforms as we soaked up the pouring Maryland sky.

After all the shuttling was successful the set time to make the final decision was made.....the event is DONE. For those that wanted to, we were still able to shuttle over to the downtown church to eat a warm meal generously provided to us. Of course, as we did this, in a weird twist of fate, the rain proceeded to stop.

Despite our privations and trials, we still managed to have a blast!

Final Score at the Battle of Burkittsville:

Federals and Confederates = ZERO

Mother Nature = A WIN

From Travis Shick



Here are two photos from the Burkittsville event. The first one shows a group of NR troops awaiting the shuttle to the staging area and hoping the rain will abate. At the far end of the shed, there is a cameraman and interviewer that we were told were from Vietnam, doing a news or possibly documentary program that would be seen by 90,000 Vietnamese (according to their American spokesman). The second picture is of all the 53rd troops in the field, on Saturday, except myself and Marc Benedict. The guy on the right (who looks suspiciously like Zach), is Zach's brother Travis, who came down to join us in the blue ranks (he usually wears gray).

Book Review - "Untried Lives That Strike Close To Home"

by Travis Shick

A book review of James T. Fritsch's *The Untried Life: The Twenty-Ninth Ohio Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War*

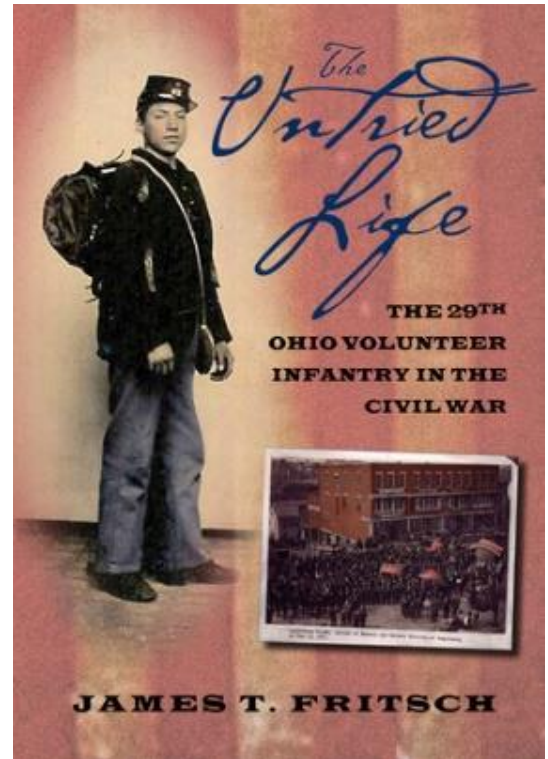
From the get-go, I have to admit I am not a completely unbiased reader, when it comes to James T. Fritsch's *The Untried Life: The Twenty-Ninth Ohio Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War*. In the first case, I am a reenactor. In the second place I was born and raised in Akron, Ohio. The first point implies that I am a huge fan of the history of the American Civil War, with perhaps more of a heightened mania for the details than your average military history buff (I suspect my readers may suffer a similar affliction). The second point may illuminate why this regimental history, despite its length, was the book that leaped off the Gettysburg NMP book store shelf and into my hands. I spent the first seventeen years of my life in the same fields and woods that many of the members of the 29th Ohio were recruited from.

At first glance this book may not seem too unique. It follows a relatively obscure, mid-Atlantic regiment from its inception to its disbandment, at the end of the war. The value, however, of this book lies both in its ordinary guise but also its uniqueness. This regimental history starts with a unique twist to the familiar story of rural citizens spurred into a martial fervor with the firing upon Fort Sumter. What makes the 29th fairly unique is that it was raised in the decidedly anti-slavery region of Ashtabula and Summit Counties, in Ohio. The regiment even took the moniker, "The Gidding's regiment" after a particularly vocal anti-slavery politician. Contrary to original intents, the Regiment was not entirely mustered out of 'handpicked' abolitionists, with a burning desire to answer the President's call to arms. Attempts to fill the last dozens of unit manning vacancies and struggles to overcome the bureaucratic obstacles between them and the front lines will not be unfamiliar to the student of the War. The reader then follows the Regiment in its long journal from the opening engagements of the War to the agonizing demobilization process after the grand review in Washington. Along the way, the reader is given a detailed account of the unit's involvement in battles such as Kernstown, Cedar Mountain, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg. As members of Geary's Division, the 29th Ohio leaps from the Army of the Potomac to Hooker's command at Chattanooga, in time to take part in the march to the sea and the drive north up through the Carolinas.

This synopsis may seem all well and good, but again, why invest the time and trouble to read this regimental history, when there are other histories of more celebrated units clamoring for your attention? I can almost guarantee that this question will occur to the reader time and time again, as he begins reading this tome. It is truly a slow read. The writing style is not ponderous, and Fritsch does not overindulge in dramatic bouts of empathy and sentimentalism, which unfortunately marks so many histories these days. In fact, the writing style is efficient and smooth. What makes it a slow read is simply the amount of information that is crammed into every page. Fritsch has taken what seems to be mountains of data gleaned from every corner, particularly diaries and newspapers, and ensured that everything of note finds its proper place in his book. This is where, from my reenactor's perspective, Mr. Fritsch truly provides us with a dazzling gem field to be mined by his more astute readers. I suspect Mr. Fritsch is not a reenactor or long time Civil War historian himself, as there were a couple of minor points that suggested to me that Mr. Fritsch's background knowledge was not complete when he started his study. I think in this case, however, that is a good thing. Mr. Fritsch's skills as a researcher and writer are outstanding, but his novice perspective, I suspect, lead him to include a continuous fountain of details that a more mainstream historian would have left out. These are a boon to the reenactor. A few illustrative examples; Mr. Fritsch doesn't simply say that the casualties from the Atlanta campaign were sent to hospitals up north, he gives a brief description of how the boxcars were specifically modified to handle the casualties. Mr. Fritsch is careful to note when the Regiment received new stores of uniforms and shoes from which to draw. This gives a much clearer picture of the condition of the ranks at different points in the war. I was surprised how often the 29th Ohio was forced to march with numbers of shoeless soldiers making up the column. These details are particularly beneficial to those of the reenactor community, when he briefly describes some of the differences the men observed when they were transferred to the western theater, and Mr. Fritsch highlights the different preferences in headgear and leisure activities. Mr. Fritsch's descriptive powers are also applied to the home front. These powers to not simply dwell on the families mourning at their 'vacant chair' but how the War transformed the previously small hamlet of Akron, Ohio and how its newspapers interpreted the events on the front that directly affected the 29th.

The Untried Life took me much longer to read than I expected, but after a few chapters I never questioned the benefits of reading it. I firmly believe it to be an enlightening read for both novice and veteran reenactor alike.

Another advantage of Mr. Fritsch's writing style is, much like *Band of Brothers*, it produces a stirring of the reader's heart toward the soldiers it describes. By the Atlanta Campaign, you may find yourself less



interested in if the 29th will played a vital role in the next engagement and more anxious that these men, whom you've followed so closely their struggles, manage to survive the last remaining months of the War and avoid catastrophe.

I should add one final comment on *The Untried Life*. This addition might be considered a third note of my lack of bias, but truthfully it did not occur to me until the last ten pages of the book. Mr. Fritsch's succinct, yet detailed style is exceptionally even handed throughout the book. The beginning of the war, the middle of the war, the last campaigns, the great battles, the months of doldrums, all receive their due attention. Because of this, the journey home at War's end was not just a footnote. It painted the detailed picture of anxious men trying to celebrate in the midst of unceasing rumors, Army bureaucracy, lack of information from HQ, questions about pay, and travel delays. Having endured similar feelings and experiences during my own return from my, albeit far less deadly and horrific War, I was struck much closer to home than at any other time in the book. It was here that I realized that perhaps Mr. Fritsch's work had done a far better job in taping into the true psyche of the American soldier and the things he finds important than a great many legions of more commonplace historians ever manage to do.

A word from our president.....

Gentlemen,

With our season rapidly winding down I want to make a last minute push for our final field event of the year. We'll be positioned at Spangler's Spring for a living history October 6&7. If the weather cooperates it will be a good weekend with plenty of visitor traffic. I don't have the exact demo schedule from Tom Holbrook yet but I expect there to be three demos on Saturday and two on Sunday. Plan to be in camp and set by 9:00am on Saturday. There's a modern bathroom with water and also plenty of firewood on site.

It's also time to start shifting our focus to the annual business meeting. Like I've done in the past, I'll ask all of you to forward to me any event that you would like to have considered for the 2019. Give me as much detail as possible along with a contact for the event. The office of Vice President will be open for election this year. Croce has informed me that he will not be seeking reelection. As of this time, the only nominee that I have for VP is Pete Zinkus. I'll need any other nominations no later than October 15th. The formal list will be published in the November Newsletter.

Pat Rose informed me that he's stepping down as Treasurer. I'm formally asking for a volunteer step into the role for the balance of Pat's term which runs through 2019. In the event I receive more than one volunteer I'll call for a vote from the membership. Keep in mind that if you volunteer there's a high likelihood that you'll be nominated for a two year term in the 2019 election.

Eric

Thanks,
Eric

Upcoming events –

6 – 7 October - Spangler's Spring - Gettysburg NMP

Our annual living history at Gettysburg National Military Park. As noted above, if you have a 95th PA jacket, bring it along. We will be portraying the 95th PVI and 53rd PVI for this event. Bring your normal kit, food, plan on rounds for 5 firing demos (40 rounds should suffice), as well as display items to show visitors.

3 November – 53rd PVI Monument Cleanup – Gettysburg NMP

Our bi-annual monument cleanup. Please arrive by 10AM and bring loupers, rakes, pruners, etc. to help clear growth and remove leaves on either side of the road near the 53rd PVI monument. Assuming we get a good turnout, we are normally done in 2 hours or less.

If you have not submitted your "Get To Know Your Pard" profile yet, please send it to the editor ASAP for inclusion in a future newsletter!

2018 Calendar of Events -

13 January — Holiday Party — Gettysburg
3 February — Winter Drill (Landis Valley) — Lancaster
17 — 18 February — National Regiment “School Of The Soldier” — 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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