

53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry

Company C

"The Sentinel" September 2018

Newsletter of The James Creek Guards



"Clubs Are Trump!"

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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

Gettysburg 155 Photos and Summary - (by Travis Shick)





The 155th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg is in the books, and the GAC has come and gone. Due to the political climate, the thwarted Cedar Creek attack, the 'condition of the hobby,' the threat of farb-festivitees, and heaven knows what else, it may be more of a surprise that this year's event was as well attended as it was. According to the rumor mill, this year's attendance was over 5,500 reenactors. A staggering number in this day and age. Traffic, parking, and infrastructure this year seemed to go smoothly. The battle scenarios were well orchestrated, although historical accuracy was sacrificed for the physical constraints

of the upper field. Sutler's row was not as good as it may have been, less authentic repros and shockingly not a single dedicated armorer.

The National regiment was present. Our number were comparatively small, but the company was fine. As usual, the NR was as island of shelter halves in a sea of A's. We fell in with the Mifflin Guard, and represented our Regiment well. The 53rd provided three soldiers for the line: Zach, Mike, and myself.

As you may have already deduced, it's easy for me to slip into a more farb-critical writing style, for this event. Ice angels hovered about in flocks, the Dodge, Ford, and Chevy motorcade for artillery transport was parked along the edge of the battle field for easy access of their red-leg owners, and one didn't have to walk far to find a half-hidden water cooler. I would however, like to take another road. The road of a newbie spectator. I had a better insight into this view this year, as this was the first very large event my parents, wife, children, and nephew had ever attended. All but my nephew had seen smaller events over the years, but as you can imagine, a sight like the GAC was a marvel for them to behold. The opportunity to see reenactors in these numbers are few, for those who don't live in Virginia. And these numbers should not be quickly dismissed by those of us in the ranks. The sheer pageantry of thousands of wool clad soldiers passing by, the crowd of horse mounted cavalry, the thunder of lines of artillery, the warm, glowing sight of a large tented camp bedding down for the night...none of these sights are easily forgotten, more so in the minds of those no jaded by years of 'hard' reenactor seasons. Hearing the words of awe from my family reminded me of that wide-eyed wonder that I too had when I first came to the hobby. Sure they saw the trucks on the edge of the battlefield, they understood that most Civil War generals didn't carry walkie talkies, but they all left that day with a smile on their faces and more than just a few thoughts of remembrance toward those columns of true soldiers who march off to war so long ago. It is here that even these 'powder burners' have their true value.

I have read recently that the only area of Civil War reenacting that is expanding is in the ranks of the 'hard corps campaigners.' I wonder if this might be a good thing. Perhaps this trend will nudge the big events, over time, toward better authenticity. I did have one campaigner tell me that the one area that he felt the campaigners suffered in comparison to their more mainstream brethren was in large unit drill. This may change in time too, but for now this is at least one area where the GAC can show its biggest value. If you squinted your eyes just right, wasn't too difficult to get caught up in the moment. The long columns of blue lines marching through the tents and maneuvering on the field were a sight to behold. The memory of rushing the road as a company and tearing down (or at least attempting to tear down) the post and rail fence is much appreciated by me...perhaps as much as the thundering battalion volleys were appreciated by my kids.

These sense of wonder was reinforced, when Tom Downes stepped up with two unarmed reenactors, just before one of the battle scenarios. I was at the 'tall feller' end of the line, and Tom placed these two gents, not in the ranks, but just behind. To our surprise, the pair turned out to be a writer and photographer from The New York Times. They were working on an on-line story about the state of Civil War reenacting today. The pair were quite friendly, respectful, and inquisitive. Their article has since been published, and, perhaps aside from the title directed by their editor, is an enjoyable read. They too held the perspective of the non-veteran. Again, hearing their questions as well stood awaiting our turn to engage the 'enemy,' I heard similar questions to what I heard from my family. It left me to again ponder this largest of Civil War events, and its overall worth. I looked at the lines of gaudy, colorfully garbed civilians and wondered if any of the kids in those crowds, perhaps seeing an event for the first time, will be the ones that carry our colors in the decades to come. How will they remember these events differently than I do?

Massive formations, pickup trucks, cavalry battles, cell phones, the sound of the drums, the log jam in parking ... I can only guess. I will, however, speculate on one thing, there will be a fair share on wonder in the minds of those wonderful 'newbies' who saw the 155th Gettysburg.

Submitted by Travis Shick.

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, Jan. 18th, 1862.

Messrs. Editors:--Rain, Hail, snow and mud; and mud, snow, hail and rain, has been the weather "order of exercise" during the past week. The sun appears to have entirely disappeared and thick fogs, forboding clouds, and spattering rain-drops are in the ascendancy. The bad weather, and per consequence, miserable roads, makes martial movements on any very extended scale an impossibility, unless a new military road is cut through the fog. So far this year we have done very little drilling, the condition of the weather and six inches of mud, preventing it. For the last four or five days, dress parade has been dispensed with for the same reasons.

We were visited last week by Messers. John W. Casselberry and David Weand of Pottstown. Although the weather was not very favorable for an inspection of our quarters, yet they expressed themselves pleased with the manner in which we were getting along, and were somewhat surprised to see how comfortable we were fixed up to resist the attacks of Jack Frost and his icy friends. Mr. Weand came on to procure a furlough or discharge for his son, Milton S. Weand, a prominent member of the Regimental Band, who has been for months past sick with typhoid fever, at the Indiana Hospital, Patent Office, Washington. At one time he was dangerously ill, but he is now convalescent, although it will perhaps require some time yet before he will be "himself again." We hope that when our friend Milton is surrounded by the friends and comforts of home, (and to the sick soldier home is truly sweet) he will speedily recover. His efficient services are missed in the Band, and his genial smile and hearty good nature are wanting in the camp.

Major Yeager has returned with his health much improved, and Captain Bull, who has been acting in that position during the Major's absence, has again resumed command of Company A.

Nearly every night, and sometimes during the day, we hear heavy firing down the Potomac. It is the rebel batteries firing at the vessels running the blockade. When the Pensacola left her anchorage in the river off Alexandria and proceeded down the river, protected on the right side by a schooner loaded with wet hay, we plainly heard the sullen boom of every gun fired at her. Last evening continuous firing was kept up all the night; sometimes as many as ten or twelve shots a minute were discharged. We have not heard what was the cause of it. Some amusing incidents occur in camp sometimes. One of the members of Company A secured a large and fat white rabbit, which by continued caressing has become quite tame and playful, and as a matter of course is a favorite.

One evening the happy owner of the pet animal returned from Alexandria with several heads of cabbage, intending to make a small lot of sour-cROUT. He stuffed the cabbage under the bed and retired. On getting up in the morning, behold the cabbage was non est. The appearance of things indicated, and truly, that soft coat had made away with it. In looking around behind some wood near the tent, a head of cabbage was discovered. On examining it the impress of the rabbit's teeth could be plainly seen. The animal was not able to devour more than one head that night, and so he was cute enough to drag the other out of the tent and hide it behind the wood for future meals, in what, we presume, he considered a safe place. One day while standing on the Washington side of the Long Bridge, we noticed as the soldiers had their passes examined by the Lieutenant of the Guard, the canteens were examined, and if containing any liquor, it was emptied upon the ground. A Zouave came along pretty well "happy, happy be." The Lieutenant eyed him for some time and then suddenly turned as if struck by a bright idea, and hastens to a pump nearby and pumps water in his canteen, and then boldly walks up to the guard and presents his pass. The pass was right. "What have you in the canteen?" asks the Lieutenant. "Water mixed," answers Zoo-zoo. In the meantime the guard scented the whiskey, and was about to pour it out. "Hold on now," says the half tipsy soldier, "I own you have a right to spill out the whiskey, but you have no right to empty my water!" It might have been a fine thing but the guard couldn't see it, and the consequence was liquor and water was scattered indiscriminately on the ground, and the Zouave passed over the Bridge with an empty canteen and a doleful face.

A member of Richard's Cavalry of Reading, was doing picket duty on the Upper Potomac. He was stationed where two roads met. About twilight two persons came driving along in a buggy. He halted them, examined the wagon to see if it contained anything contraband, and finally asked where they were going. They answered that they were going to a wedding a few miles beyond his post. "Will they have anything to drink there?" asked the guard. "Oh! lots of it." "Well then I'll go along," and he jumped into the buggy and away he went. During his absence the corporal came round and found the post deserted. While looking around for the guard and leaving off a few mild oaths, the absentee made his appearance. After explaining matters, the guard accompanied by the Corporal again started for the wedding; where they spent several free and easy hours. Of course when they returned to quarters they were severely reprimanded, and punished, I believe, by being made to walk the ring for several days. Some of the three months boys in Pottstown can tell what kind of a punishment the ring is.

There is nothing of moment transpiring, and your readers must bear with me in writing these uninteresting letters. I have hopes that ere long we will have an opportunity of participating in events that will furnish us with sufficient items for a valuable correspondence. The officers of the regiment are, for obvious reasons, endeavoring to get out of this brigade. We like Gen. French very well, but this is a New York brigade, composed of German regiments, and there is not much friendship and less association between us. We belong in a Pennsylvania brigade, and we have pretty good reasons for believing that for long we will be.

[Ledger, January 21, 1862]

L. J. F.

Halt! Who comes there?!

by [The Jersey Gallinipper](#) (reprinted with permission)



(due to the 53rd PVI and National Regiment integrating guard mount more and more into our events due to recent outside issues, this article seemed very timely – editor)

The mysteries of guard mount.

Image - "Guard" by Forbes

"Who comes there? Watson got it wrong, huh? Everybody knows it's 'who goes there?'"

Yeah, well, guess what? "Everybody" is wrong. The correct challenge is "Who comes there?"*

which, if you just think about it, makes much more sense. Having said that, let me add that there's

anecdotal information that both challenges were used, but let's just pretend we're in John Gibbons' brigade, 1862.

Gibbon was a real stickler for the details.

Reenactors: A lot of what we "know" about guard duty is simply wrong and, when we're right, very often we seem to be focused on the details that are less critical to the mission of guard.

So, what's it all about? This is going to be a "functionality" explanation for mounting a basic around-the-camp guard. If you want the ritualized details and the exact positioning of every person involved, please consult ["Instructions for Guards and Pickets," Third Edition](#), by Dom Dal Bello, Army of the Pacific. Dom has sorted it out, with diagrams. So, incidentally, have Daniel Butterfield (["Camp and Outpost Duty, 1862"](#)) and a few other folks who actually did this for a living during the war, with books and pamphlets available both in print and online.

One procedure - there are several, all similar - for mounting a guard company is for the unit's leadership to determine how many guard posts are needed. Multiply that by three, for the three eight-hour "shifts" that go into the normal one day of guard duty, add sergeants and corporals as needed, plus an officer, and you have a "guard company." The personnel requirements are divided among companies in the

unit posting the guard. Each company might be required to supply five men, with three companies also required to add a corporal, and one a sergeant. The officer duty list is maintained separately.

Those men are prepared for duty by reporting, fully equipped †(see end of article), to the first sergeant of their company, who makes his own inspection. He, at the appointed time, marches them to the spot where it's been decided the guard company will muster and be stationed. There they are presented, first, to the regimental sergeant major, with the regimental adjutant hovering nearby. If the sergeant major sees no problem, they are moved to the company formation. If he does see a problem - nonfunctioning musket, or a man in obvious physical distress, or a soldier with a sloppy appearance, for instance - that man's first sergeant will have to supply a replacement (he has brought a couple of "supernumeraries" to the guard mount specifically for this possibility).

When that is sorted, the sergeant major orders the men to form by size, and double, with all noncoms kept out of the ranks.

The sergeant major reports the guard assembled to the adjutant, who then posts the noncoms. The sergeants each command one platoon and are positioned as if they were officers, with two corporals posted as first and second sergeants. Any other noncoms are posted as file closers.

This initial sorting out gives the battalion a guard company **that can also function as a normal line infantry company if needed**, say if the battalion has to march off in a hurry. (This did happen occasionally, although the only example I can bring to mind right away was the small "guard" battalion created at the Battle of Assaye in India in 1803 by Wellington's army, a battalion made up of one guard company each from the small army's six battalions. It had about 500 men, and went into battle straight from a march that came up suddenly, after they were formed for guard duty, when Wellington found out the Indian army he was chasing was actually much closer than expected. Off they went.) It can also function as a line company in the event of any disruption requiring an organized force to sort out, like a mob approaching camp.



Above - This is a full-blown guard mount of the 114th Pennsylvania, complete with music. You can see the officer of the guard in front, accompanied by the officer of the day - note the sash worn diagonally over his right shoulder. The officer behind them may very well be the regimental commander.

1st Lt. George Reifsnnyder Co. D

Born 1833. Died Jan. 13, 1907.
Pottstown Cemetery East, Pottstown, PA.



Pvt. Augustus S. Royer, Co. A

Born Nov. 29, 1840. Died Dec. 4, 1862. Buried
at St. Lukes Lutheran Church Cemetery, Obelisk, PA



Priv. John Rutter, Co. A

Unknown birth date. Died July 14, 1913
Buried in Maple Grove Cemetery, Wichita, KS.



Priv. George Ruggles, Co. G

Born on Feb. 14, 1832 in NY. Died April 28, 1913
Buried in Montrose Cemetery, Montrose, Michigan.
Transferred from Co. H. 148th PVI.



A word from our president.....

Pards,

Burkittsville is next on the schedule. As of August 27th, I see Benedict, Fasnacht, Porterfield, Zinkus, Fedorshak, Rose, Shick and myself have registered. As I have previously asked, if you're not listed and should be, let me know ASAP. Also, I've been informed that there have been some errors in listing folks in the wrong unit on the registration site. If you see your name listed with another unit or see a strange name listed with the 53rd it will be corrected when you check in at the registration site. Bring plenty of rounds.

Next up will be our living history program for the NPS at Gettysburg October 6&7. We'll be at Spangler's Spring again this year. If you have a 95th jacket please bring it along. If not, no problem. I don't want anyone to pass on the event just because they don't have the jacket. If you have one and can't attend please consider loaning your jacket to someone who needs it for the weekend. Plan to do two firing demos each day.

We'll be voting for the office of VP at this year's annual business meeting. Please send me your nominations no later than October 15th. As always, please confirm that the person you're nominating is

willing and able to accept the responsibilities of the office before you nominate them. We'll publish the nominee's in the November newsletter. If you're nominated and unsure of the VP's duties, please contact me for the details.

Thanks,
Eric

Upcoming events –

7 – 9 September - Burkittsville, MD - (please see above info from Eric)

6 – 7 October - Gettysburg – Spangler's Spring

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, rounds for 2 per day firing demos (30 rounds should suffice), as well as items to show visitors.

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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