

53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry

Company C

"The Sentinel" August 2019

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

USEFUL DRILL TIP #1

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

"By company into line, MARCH."

Sharpen up your unit

"Tip" may not be the right word. How about insight?



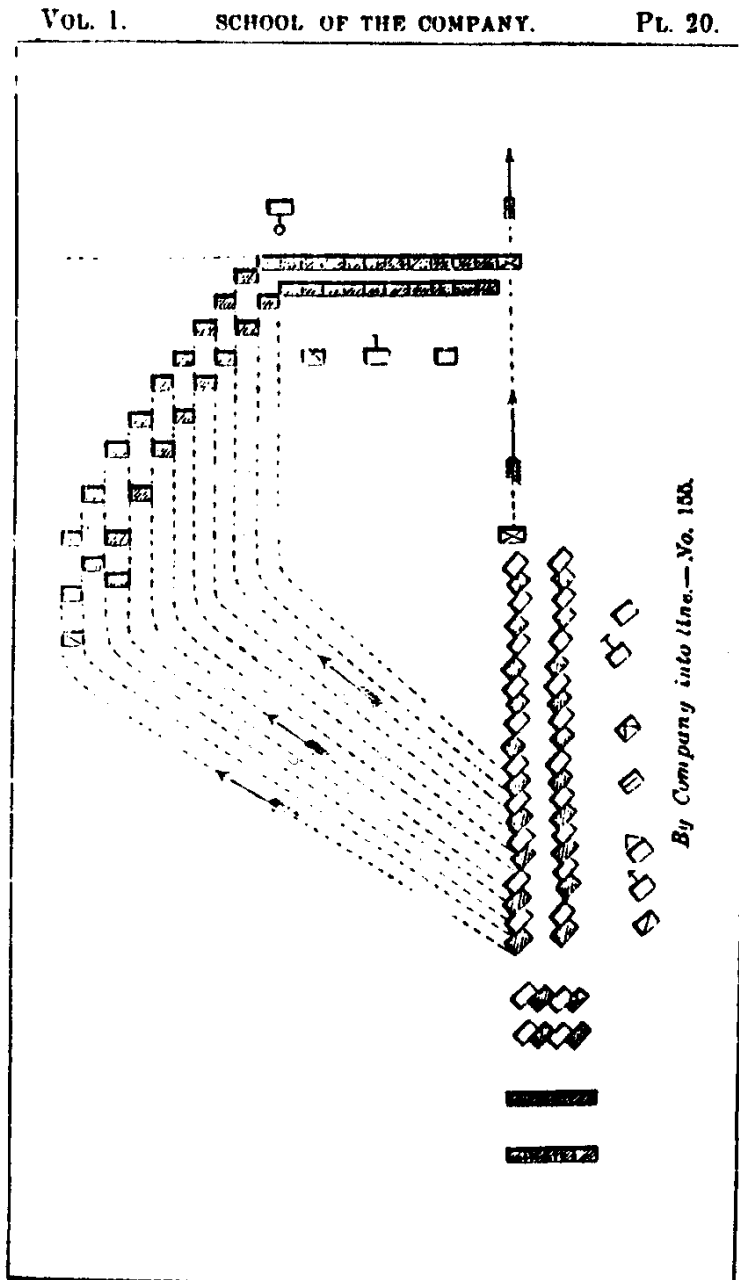
Either way, here's the first in a series of posts that will help your unit perform with sharpness, alacrity and confidence. Those things do matter - units that can maneuver well, like the Mifflin Guard, take an enormous amount of pride in their skill. And here's a comment from a young lady on another Web site, who will remain appropriately anonymous: " I will tell you that there is no greater sight than men in uniform in perfect unified step. Make my heart flutter." If that doesn't make you want to march to the step, nothing will.

Here's the first of a few "uh-oh" commands, simplified just by understanding. No tricks, reenactorisms or anything else. Just,

perhaps, an epiphany induced by a teensy bit more knowledge than we knew was there. One a week, just to keep it manageable. If you've got a pet maneuver you want unraveled, let me know.

Here's your insight: Not every action necessary to execute a maneuver has it's own little command.

"By company into line, MARCH" is the command that moves your company from a flank march (what reenactors sometimes shorthand as "marching by fours") into a company front. It is usually a real mess. The mess will go away when you dissect the directions for doing this AND study the diagram Casey or Hardee or somebody thoughtfully provided after realizing that perhaps words just didn't make the point.



Do you see what's happened in the diagram? The company is "undoubling" before moving to reform in line of battle. (Look at the bottom of the image; the men are still in fours. That's to show you where they started the maneuver from.) In essence the men have "fronted," then moved. There is no command to do that. But it's part of the execution.

Here's the wording, from Casey: "At the command *march*, the covering sergeant will continue to march straight forward; the men will advance the right shoulder, take the double-quick step, and move into line, by the shortest route, **taking care to undouble the files** and to come on the line one after the other." Undoubling is part of the maneuver, along with coming to the double quick and, as a result of the double quick, coming to right shoulder shift while at the double quick. We all seem to know the double quick and the right shoulder shift, but somewhere in the years since 1961, when reenacting took off, we lost the undoubling. We just have a mob, usually.

There are learning steps to make this easier to master. First time you do it, 1. do it at a walk and 2. have the first sergeant halt. Second time, walk, but have the first sergeant take little steps, like 9" or so. Third time, first sergeant continues at a marching pace and the rank and file double quick, at right shoulder, to get into line. Now you're

there. You are doing it with one of my favorite words, "*alacrity*."

Black Powder Safety and Muzzle Discipline

By Eric Ford

We have all been well trained in the safe handling of our rifles and black powder. We constantly train in proper loading procedures and our Officer's and NCO's do a great service in observing the ranks during firing demos and reenactments to ensure safe conditions. The men in the ranks also watch out for each other and never hesitate to correct a potentially hazardous situation. We do all of this in an effort to minimize the risk of accidents and injury. When we're dealing with a substance like black powder that's all we can do. We can't completely eliminate the risk.

For those of you who weren't at Landis Valley and haven't heard through the grapevine, I had an incident during our firing demo Saturday afternoon that I'd like to recap in an effort to make sure that all of you take the precautions and training we put in place seriously. I was "charging cartridge" on my third round in the demo when the powder that I was pouring down the muzzle ignited and flashed in my face. I will tell you that the split second it took for this to happen is crystal clear in mind. I can vividly recall the red flash, heat and smoke. Luckily, muzzle position kept my exposure to a minimum and prevented the man in the front rank from being injured. I received a minor burn to the left side of my face that simply tingles like a minor sunburn, some power residue in my left eye and a singed eyebrow and beard. Visually, there's no sign of anything. My vision was a little blurred but became normal after about an hour. Fortunately, we had a first responder (George Craven, 3rd MD) in our ranks and he was providing aid to me within seconds of me falling out of the ranks. All things considered, this could have been a lot worse.

Looking back, I can't think of anything that I could have done differently. It was just a one of those things that we know can happen but many of us never see it or have it happen. Afterwards, it obviously initiated conversations about safety. I can't count the number of times I've looked down the ranks while we're loading and see guys practically looking down the muzzle. Please reevaluate your techniques! Let this accident serve as a reminder that this hobby comes with certain risks. Like I said before, all we can do is minimize the risk. I'll also admit that I was shaking so bad on Sunday during the demos that I think more powder landed on the ground than went down the muzzle. Thanks to the my loving pards in the 53rd and ELF, I was reminded that there's humor in every situation.

Landis Valley "Civil War Days" Event

On July 20~21st, the 53rd PVI participated in Landis Valley Museum's "Civil War Days" event. The weather forecast called for temperatures in the mid to high 90s with heat indices from 105~115. I think the weather report was accurate. Due to this, our schedule was lightened and simplified for the safety of the men and visitors. We still did 2 firing demos each day, but instead of going out into the field and doing maneuvers, etc., while Chip and Dan did the short talk to the crowd about loading, etc., the men stood in the shade before the entrance to the field and did a short manual of arms demonstration. Then, we marched out into the field, Capt. Carlson commanded us to do a short right wheel to aim away from the crown, and then we did our normal 7 round demo. Short and sweet. As noted above under Eric's column, he had a 'little adventure' while reloading. He was very lucky he was relatively unscathed yet he was well cared for by the men. It is also a good training opportunity.. both being careful about loading and firing as well as to help care for your fellow pard.

The men had a fine meal Saturday evening at the Hotel Jasper.. thanks to Tim Boyd (Chia), Tony Albright, and Russ Young in putting together a great meal. We had steak, veggies, cucumbers, bread, etc. Jonathan Psotka also did a period-style bartender scenario and provided the men with some period beverages that seemed to go over very well.

Sunday morning, we had another fine breakfast at the Hotel Jasper including eggs, bacon, bread, and even pie. Starting Sunday morning with a piece of pie is surely a real treat!

Sunday seemed slightly cooler (if 2 degrees makes any difference) on Sunday. It also seemed that we may have had a slightly larger crowd on Sunday. Sgt. Benedict and myself (Corporal Steger) did a kids/adult drill Sunday afternoon.. we kept it simple and basic due to the heat, although I think the participants had some fun. Plus, nobody got sick as in 2018. Hi.

Overall, the weekend can be summarized in this way.. we sweat a lot. We sat a lot. We drank lots of water. We ate well. That was what we planned on doing due to the heat and we all survived.

In attendance were: Steger, Espenshade, Ford, Bohnenblust, Mitchell, Volpe, Williard, and Benedict. Pete and Michelle Zinkus also visited us but Pete could not fall in due to recent surgery. Nine (9) of our ELF company friends (Smith, Seibert, Bloom, Psotka, Craven, Calhoun, Boyd, Albright, Young, and Carlson) also attended. The following are some photos taken during the event: (supplied by Pete Zinkus, myself, Chip Smith, Eric and Traci Ford)



The below photo may warrant a caption contest, however it looks like a rather important discussion is occurring.



The above photo shows the men resting after Sat. dinner in the Hotel Jasper. When you look up the 18th amendment on Wikipedia, this photo is there near the beginning of the article explaining 'why'.

← Rations Issue (we actually had fresh pork & crackers this year!!)



Croce saying 'hello' (and sticking out his tongue) from behind a piece of fresh watermelon.

← Our weekend period bartender, Jonathan Psotka



Our closest attempt at a "Lady & The Tramp" moment.. Not sure which one is the 'Tramp'.





Priv. Mitchell resting before a firing demo.. or is he holding up that tree?

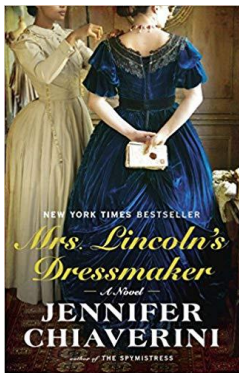
Below shows Priv. Bohnenblust with Priv. Mitchell and Corp. Espenshade cooling themselves in the shebang on a toasty afternoon.



Sgt. Benedict telling Adam and myself about the differences between moths and butterflies (that is not a made-up caption.. that is exactly what we were talking about, believe it or not..)

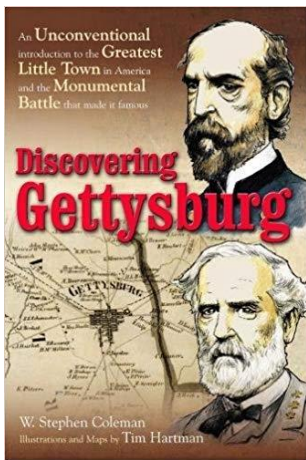
Book Reviews –

By Cathy Steger



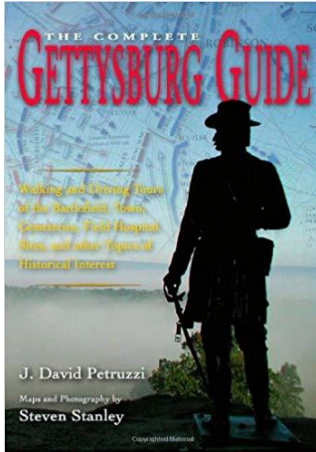
Mrs. Lincoln's Dressmaker – by Jennifer Chiaverini

This is a great historical fiction book about Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley. She was born a slave, earned her freedom and was a dressmaker in Washington DC to both Varina Davis (Jefferson Davis' wife) before they left Washington to lead the Confederacy and then to Mary Todd Lincoln once Abraham Lincoln became President. The fiction is the author surmising what the actual thoughts and conversations were for the main characters, but this book seems to be extremely well-researched and historically accurate. It is also based on an actual book that Keckley wrote about her time spent in the White House with the Lincolns (it became a controversial tell-all that was not her intent). And I still can't get over the fact I learned that when the trains from the north arrived in Baltimore to bring troops to DC, the tracks didn't connect, so they had to drag the train cars through the streets of Baltimore to put them back on tracks to get to Washington. Much of Baltimore was pro-South so this was not a great experience for the soldiers! If this book doesn't sound interesting to you, it might make a nice gift for your wife or girlfriend! I know I prefer to learn history in the context of a great story.



Discovering Gettysburg – by W. Stephen Coleman

I believe this author spoke at a Lancaster Civil War Roundtable meeting once. We didn't make it to that meeting, but the book sounded interesting so I bought it and read it. Even if you know Gettysburg pretty well, you can still learn of some hidden gems to visit and discover. The author includes sketch drawings of many of the folks he talked to while writing the book and the 53rd's own John Heiser has his drawing on page 221! To be honest, this wasn't the best book I ever read, but I did make a list of several things I want to check out on future visits to Gettysburg. The author also frequently referred to another book which I ended up buying and is a wealth of information which I will review next.

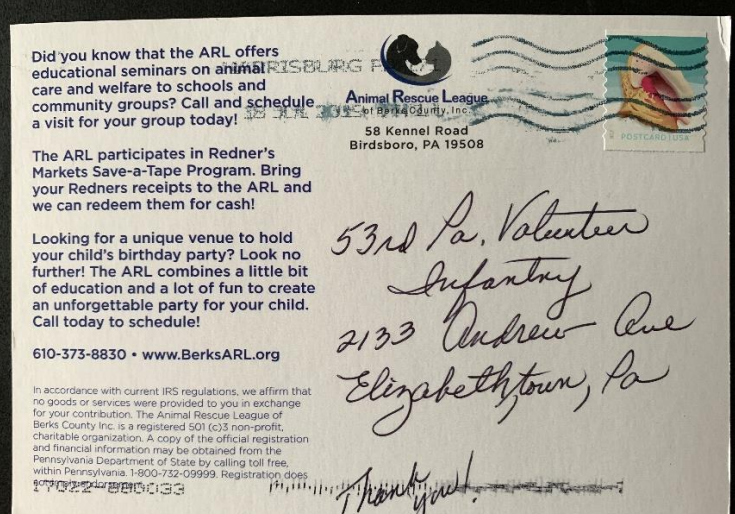


The Complete Gettysburg Guide – by J. David Petruzzi

This book is amazing. I'll quote the description on the cover; "walking and driving tours of the battlefield, town, cemeteries, field hospital sites, and other topics of historical interest". Matt and I did several of the driving tours when we were there in February and learned a lot. I had never seen the first shot monument west of town. The author directs you to the area and even tells you exactly where to park. My only "complaint" is that there is so much info in this book that it's kind of heavy to carry around! For the driving tour, you really need two people. Matt would drive and I would read the info in the book out loud. I could see how an audio version would be helpful. I think there was one at one point, but I don't think it's available any more. But, there are so many interesting maps and photos in the book that the printed version is still a must. (by the way, the book directs you to constantly re-set your odometer to 0.0, but we soon found this really wasn't necessary) One of the more interesting chapters is a tour that directs you to many of the rock carvings on the battlefield. Sometimes these are challenging to find, but it's exciting when you find a new one! I look forward to exploring the walking tours of the cemeteries if we visit in the spring or the fall.

Honoring Dave Sweigert

We recently lost a 53rd PVI alumni, Dave Sweigert. Per Dave's wishes, a donation to the Animal Rescue League of Berks County was made from the 53rd PVI in Dave's memory. We received a 'thank you' card from the organization soon after.



Gruber Wagon Works Event -

On 28 July, the 53rd PVI participated in the Back In Time event at Gruber Wagon Works (Berks County Heritage Center) near the Reading Airport. Those in attendance were: Fasnacht, Benedict, Steger, Mitchell, Williard, and Porterfield.



The event was noticeably cooler than the Landis Valley event the weekend prior. Fasnacht, Mitchell, and Steger arrived Saturday evening. We performed 2 firing demos and welcomed the crowd into camp throughout the day. We also participated in a photo shoot for a young artist (Jeff Trexler) who is painting a scene from 2nd Bull Run.

The below left side photos were provided by Williard. The tent/camp photo was supplied by your editor.



New Column Idea

While resting in the shebang during the Landis Valley event, Corp. Espenshade and I thought of a potentially new column to include in select future editions of "The Sentinel" called "Remember When...". It's meant as a recollection of something funny or educational that happened within the unit in the past, such as at a prior event. If anyone would like to submit a short write-up or article for this column, please send it my way. If you happen to have a photo to go along with the article, even better.

A word from our president.....

Pards,

Landis Valley is in the books. With the heat index at 110-115 degrees for the weekend we saw a significant drop in attendance not only by reenactors but visitor turnout was an all time low for this event. The final estimate was around 170 people for the weekend. That's about a fourth of the average turnout. Many units cancelled or went home Saturday evening. Our roster had 41 up to Thursday and dropped to 12 by the time we arrived in camp. I can't thank our friends in ELF enough for remaining committed! Given the circumstances, this event would have been a bust without them. We made it through the weekend keeping the schedule limited to two quick firing demos each day and no other physical activities. I can't think of a better place to have an event in those extreme conditions. The availability of A/C, lots of shade and the concern for our well being by the staff made the weekend bearable. Chia Lincoln, Tony Albright and Russ Young's efforts in the kitchen were again outstanding. Jonathan Psotka might have been the hero of the event mixing period cocktails Saturday evening in the hotel. I believe that we have a new tradition!

Up next on the schedule is our combined living history with ELF at Spangler's Spring. Since most didn't attend Landis Valley I hope we can rebound with a strong turnout for this event. If you're going to Shenandoah and have not registered, please do so ASAP and let me know that you have.

Eric

Upcoming events –

24 – 25 August – Gettysburg Living History Event *MAX EFFORT EVENT*

Our annual living history event at Spangler's Spring at Gettysburg NMP. Normal kit, tentage, etc. Bring rounds, caps, and food. Some of us may trek into town for dinner Sat. evening. We will likely be doing 2 firing demos each day so bring at least 30 rounds. Stay tuned to the 53rd PVI Facebook page and via email for updates on the actual schedule/program for the weekend. Please make every effort to attend as this is OUR event at Gettysburg NMP. Our continued ability to hold an event there each year depends upon a good turnout by 53rd PVI members.

Save The Date! January 11, 2020

The 53rd PVI Company C will soon be celebrating our 40th anniversary! This event is open to anyone who has ever been in our ranks. Stay tuned for more details. If you know of a past member of the 53rd PVI and have their contact information, please forward it to Eric and Pete.

For Sale –

(if you have something for sale or are looking for something, email me to include it in a future edition)

All items in good shape unless noted otherwise. Listed by Rick Kramer for a friend; contact Rick directly for any inquiries/questions - auction8@comcast.net

Unlined Sack Coat (approx. xlarge)	30.00	CnD Jarnigan Great Coat (approx. Exlarge)	100.00
Keune McDowell Kepi some brim cracking	20.00	Grey Blanket with black stripe	50.00
Rubber Poncho	20.00	Older shelter half with brass grommets	5.00

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! We still have quite a few members who have yet to share theirs with their pards. This isn't meant to pry into your private life, but simply a fun way of letting your pards get to know you more.

2019 Calendar of Events -

12 Jan. Annual Holiday Party — Dobbin House (Reservations/Payment due by 31 Dec.)
2 Feb. Winter Drill — Landis Valley (weather back up date is 16 Feb)
16 Feb. Cartridge Rolling Party — Mark Fasnacht's home (9 March back up date)
2-3 March NR School of Instruction — Gettysburg Fire Hall
5 April Ephrata Middle School — Civil War Day event with Michael Fedorshak
6 April Spring Adopt A Position
13-14 April NR Camp Of Instruction — Ft. McHenry **NR MAX EFFORT**
18-19 May USAHEC (Carlisle, PA) PAID Event **53rd MAX EFFORT**
27 May Hummelstown Memorial Day Parade
5-7 July Gettysburg GAC 2ndary Event
20-21 July Landis Valley Civil War Days — **53rd MAX EFFORT**
28 July Gruber Wagon Works (Reading, PA) **53rd MAX EFFORT**
24-25 Aug. — 53rd Gettysburg Living History — Spangler's Spring **53rd MAX EFFORT**
4-6 Oct. — Shenandoah 1864 (Lovettsville, VA) **NR MAX EFFORT**
19-20 Oct. — Cedar Creek (Middletown, VA) - 2ndary Event
2 Nov. - Autumn Adopt-A-Position — spring cleanup at the 53rd PVI Monument
16 Nov. — Remembrance Day Parade — Gettysburg
7 Dec. — 53rd PVI Annual Meeting (Mark Fasnacht's home)



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