



# Company C 53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry

"The Sentinel" November 2019

Newsletter of The James Creek Guards



"Clubs Are Trump!"

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An illustration of the burning of the Wrightsville Bridge

*I am always looking for newsletter content, so please forward your articles, book reviews, event summaries/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*

## SHENANDOAH 1864 EVENT REVIEW

Those who attended the recent Shenandoah 1864 event in northern VA had a great time. The Rear Rank Productions event had a good showing of NR member units including 8 members of the 53<sup>rd</sup> PVI: Steger, Ford, Espenshade, Fasnacht, Mitchell, Bohnenblust, Kramer, and Shick. The Porterfield brothers fought on the Confederate side. Included in the event were 2 battles on Sat. (including one at dusk) and one on Sunday. The mighty 53<sup>rd</sup> PVI had a good showing as part of 2<sup>nd</sup> company and did a great job Sat. but were pretty much annihilated near the end of the Sunday battle. Each battle was quite a show and something none of us will ever forget!

The first Saturday battle included me (your editor) being chosen to carry the National Regiment's colors into battle. This was quite the privilege and honor! I led the NR into battle with the color company of 6 men plus our Color Sgt. The color company included our very own Mark Fasnacht as well. We marched from the Federal camp across a few hilly fields, including a small creek, and up a larger hill... maybe 1,000 to 1,500 yards in total. I had never carried the colors before (although I did serve in the color company at the "Lee Takes Command" event in Etown several years back) so I had to learn quickly and make sure I didn't screw up. A screw-up on my part could have led to a defeat of our men in battle. At the end, we pushed the Rebs back into the woods and we took their artillery to win the battle. Our ELF unit friends fought to our left during all 3 battles.

Sat. evening's battle started just before dusk although it was a cloudy evening so it started getting dark earlier than normal. This battle occurred on ground adjacent to where the Saturday afternoon's battle took place. We waited just behind a rise on the field for the Rebs to attack and fought back a few Reb charges including multiple attacks on our flanks. Each battle included considerable chaos which was to be expected but the Sat. evening battle was even more chaotic. In the end, the secesh retreated back into the woods to fight another day.

The Sunday battle began with dismounted cavalry and the Federals on the side of a hill near woods. We marched by company individually in our battle front up a slight slope after the cavalry had pushed back Rebel skirmishers. We continued up the hill and our companies wheeled to form a single battle front. After pushing the Rebs back, we continued to our left and across and down a hill towards the Rebel camps where female civilians started pelting us with food scraps and curses... a rather funny and interesting touch. As we continued down a path into the woods, under fire, we ran up a rather steep dirt hill (wow.. that was a challenge!) and reformed in companies on a field at the top of the hill. The Rebs were formed to our right where we fought hard and moved forward. The battle ended with us (2<sup>nd</sup> company) being cut down nearly completely when we were ambushed by Rebs hiding behind a rail fence to our right. Our fight was over.

We were told by our leaders that observers and others reported that the battles, the hard fighting, and the showing of the National Regiment were among the best they had ever seen. We even found the Porterfield brothers in 2 of the 3 battles (and I think 2<sup>nd</sup> company took them as prisoners during the 1<sup>st</sup> battle) and the 53<sup>rd</sup> PVI came out on top.

In short summary, the Shenandoah event was well planned and well acted on the sides of the Rebs and the Federals. I had a great time and I know the rest of the 53<sup>rd</sup>'s participants did as well.

Below are photos provided by quite a few individuals including 53<sup>rd</sup> members and others from the NR Facebook page:



The men of the 53<sup>rd</sup> PVI are ready for a brawl!



Part of 2<sup>nd</sup> company's street

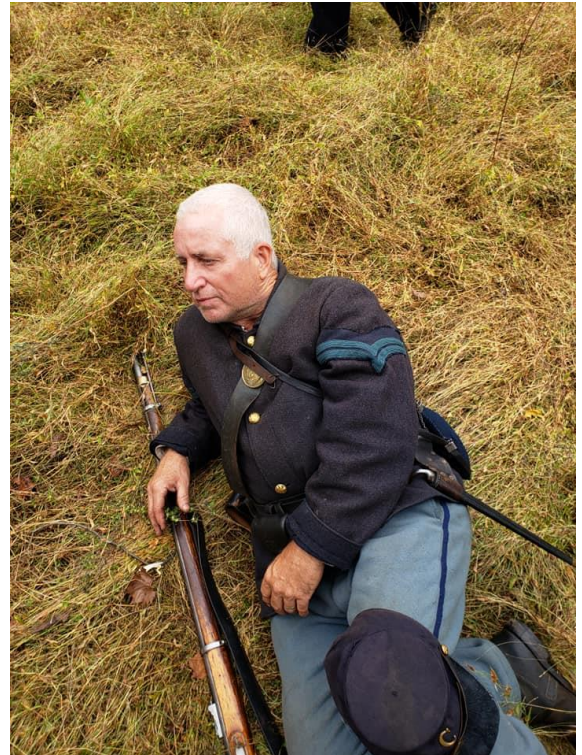


"Johnson!!" We caught us some Rebs... err... Porterfields.



Waiting to go out and start the first battle on Saturday.

Below, some leisure time in camp Sunday morning.



Killing time on Sunday morning before the last battle. Looks like Alec was also trying to catch up on sleep. Corp. Espenshade taking a breather.

Me carrying the National Regiment's colors leading the men into battle Saturday morning. Below, Sgt. Fasnacht and I are intently waiting for the Divisional Commanders to decide what they want us to do next. Bottom right shows us pushing the Rebs back up the hill ...and hopefully back to Richmond! Bottom right shows that Mike wanted to be the last man to get up Sunday morning. He apparently had not yet noticed what we had slid under his canvas.





← nice muzzle flash image posted by Chris Anders. Above, a good shot of us after waking up Sunday morning wondering 'what will today bring?'. Below, a good image of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> companies (the men of the 53<sup>rd</sup> PVI were in 2<sup>nd</sup> company) before heading out for Sunday's battle. We earned the nickname "Adler's Boys" (Lt. Col. Adler was our commander).



A spectator posted a video showing us near the end of Sunday's battle. A few minutes in, you see us come onto the field on the right (after pushing the Rebs back across 2 different fields and then climbing a rather steep dirt hill). We put up a good fight. Here's the URL: <https://www.facebook.com/100002549134321/videos/2592506627510950/>

## THEN AND NOW

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

Facebook, Twitter, Fake News, Instagram, Snopes -- politics has been put on steroids with new technology in the past decade. These technological advances mean anyone seeking elective office can reach voters through whatever pocket they keep their smart phone in. They can reach, energize and solidify support. They can create digital social groups to single out their followers and keep them informed, inflamed and, often, indignant.

It's new technology, but not a new approach. It's as old as voting, and we could, if we wanted, go back to ancient Greece and see the same techniques. But we don't go back that far. We only go back, today, to 1860, to the election of Abraham Lincoln.

It was, as it is now, a time of disorderly politics, polarization to a huge degree (hey, polarization that leads to civil war is huge, right?), tons of fake news, and a great deal of uncertainty about where the nation was headed.

And then, as now, new techniques for reaching, solidifying and mobilizing support were put into play, this time by the fledgling Republican Party, which in 1860 summarized its platform with the slogan "Free Speech, Free Soil, Free Men."

The "old" technology in 1860 included newspapers. Newspapers of the time made no pretense of dispassionate objectivity; most were openly partisan, with their position sometimes made clear even in the name of the publication, like "Dakota Republican" or "New Haven Democrat." They often did not separate opinions from facts, and even what facts they chose to include or ignore might be determined from their political stance. Everyone knew it; you read everything with a grain of salt.



The "new" use of print was in the publication, quickly, of campaign manuals, made available cheaply to new political clubs springing up everywhere in support of Lincoln.

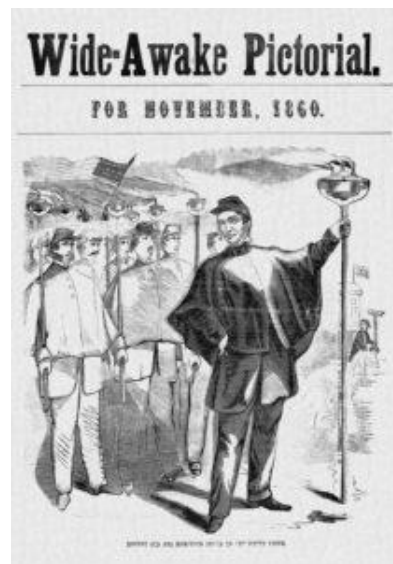
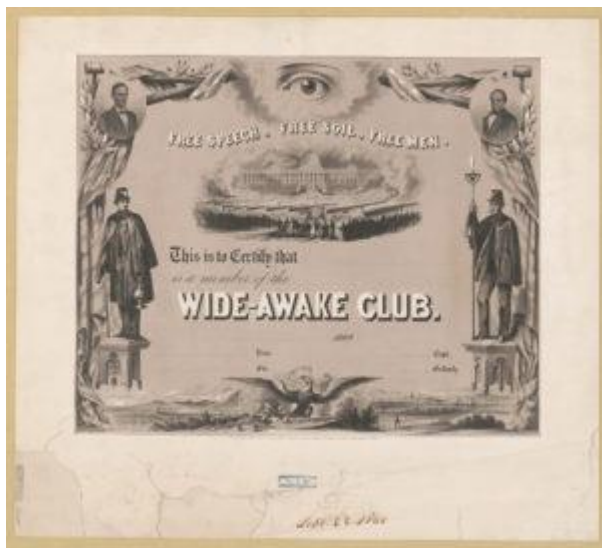
Note that Greeley was the newspaper's publisher. "Partisan" was the norm for newspapers in the 1860s.

**TO WIDE-AWAKE CLUBS.**  
**Every Wide-Awake Club should have copies of**  
**THE POLITICAL TEXT-BOOK**  
**for 1860.**  
**Compiled by HORACE GREELEY and J. F. CLEVELAND.**  
**Price \$1 per copy. Sent by mail prepaid, on receipt of price.**  
**Clubs are supplied by express at \$66 per 100. Address**  
**THE TRIBUNE, New-York.**

A "political text book" was a sort of talking-points memo, which had the effect of standardizing the political message. It quite literally put all the young men in the Wide-Awake clubs on the same page. Greeley and others didn't start the Wide

Awakes, a political club/ The Wide Awakes allegedly formed spontaneously in March 1860 in Hartford, Conn., when five store clerks grabbed rubber ponchos and torches and escorted Abraham Lincoln to his podium, where he spoke against slavery and for the right of workers to strike. Lincoln loved the concept and it rapidly spread.

I say "allegedly," because I wasn't there and it does sound like a good story, almost as good as splitting rails and reading books by firelight in a log cabin. In any event, the Wide Awakes exploded, eventually reaching 500,000 members in northern states. They adopted uniforms featuring capes and each carried a torch; they drilled, so that when they marched in political parades they projected an impressively disciplined, unified, and highly idealistic and motivate presence that gave onlookers the idea of an unstoppable force. They offered an antidote to the political instability that marked the decade, which saw a plethora of political movements and, in places like Missouri, politics with violence.



Journal of American History, [Link](#)

When you put the Wide Awakes, most of whom were quite young, with many too young to vote, alongside the fireworks, hired bands, floats, "transparencies", (backlit posters featuring images and slogans, carried on poles), you provided a lot of excitement, entertainment and joy for people of 1860, who you

could then inject with a bit of associated politics and enlist in your cause.

What was their role? According to their own literature, they were to act as political police (no, I don't know what that means), escort Republican speakers, attend all public meetings and keep order, attend the polls, "conduct themselves in such a manner as to induce all Republicans to join them" and, generally, work for the good of the Republican ticket. To be a body joined together in large numbers to work for the good of the Republican Ticket.

For us, as Civil War replicators, there's some takeaways.

First, there is some reason to believe many of these young Wide Awakes became part of the volunteer phase of the Union army. War, after all, is the continuation of politics by other means (von Clausewitz), and some who have

researched this more extensively than I note that the Wide Awakes were a very militarized bunch, already acclimated by their 1860 mission of protecting candidates.

Second, the equipment. We think of a torch as a flaming stick with oil- or resin-soaked cloth on fire at one end. Think instead of oil lanterns without glass globes, carried on a pole with a U-shaped metal bracket on one end, with the lantern suspended on a rod across the top of the U. And sometimes, according to the photos, they just carried regular glass-globed lanterns of various types. And we already have capes, which were much like our ponchos and rubber blankets.

Third, the Wide Awakes encouraged young women to attend, and many of the rallies were pretty much social, with refreshments and whatnot. So, provision for young women got them involved, and that led to more young men wanting to get involved, etc. An upward membership spiral.

So, there's some quality fodder for your living history presentations. And some ideas for scenarios. Some of us routinely attend events where Abe puts in an appearance; there's usually a military escort, but an escort of Wide Awakes would be a real conversation starter, especially for a nighttime lantern tour .

*Some articles of relevance:*

["They marched with torches."](#)

["The Torchlight Parade"](#)

["The Wide Awakes"](#) (Wikipedia - their sources are listed.)

["Young Men for War"](#) Quite scholarly.

*[A word from our president.....](#)*

Pards,

We're coming up on the end of the year but we have a busy November ahead of us. Here's a final reminder to look over the proposed revisions to the NR's bylaws and give me any feedback that you have. We'll be voting on those changes at the annual meeting on Remembrance Day. Also, let me know if you have a nominee for the Soldier of the Year and the newly created recognition by the Board called the Participation Award. As I mentioned in an earlier email, all NR members are encouraged to nominate one member from their respective unit to be recognized by the board for their commitment to their unit. The winner is chosen by the board and will be awarded a \$100 gift certificate.

- Adopt-A-Position is scheduled for November 2nd. Please be at the monument site and ready to go at 10:00am. Don't forget rakes and pruning tools.
- Remembrance Day is November 23rd. Please let me know if you will be attending. I'll forward final details when I get them from the Col. There will be a photo op at the 53rd's monument following the parade.
- The annual business meeting is scheduled for December 7<sup>th</sup>. Sgt. Fasnacht is graciously hosting the event at his home once again. Everyone should know where he lives but if you're unsure, contact me or find his address on the unit roster. The meeting will start promptly at 9:00am. There will be the typical potluck lunch following the meeting. Please bring a dish to share or supply paper plates, napkins or plastic utensils. This year's meeting will cover a review of the NR's meeting, setting the 2020 schedule, changes to our social media presence, the holiday party/40th anniversary and other unit business. We'll also elect the unit's President and all NCO's for new terms. The nominees for those positions are:

**President:** Ford

**Cpl's:** Espenshade, Steger, Mitchell and Bohnenblust

**Sgt's:** Fasnacht, Espenshade and Benedict.

If you will **NOT** be at the meeting, please contact Pete Zinkus between November 24th and 29th for your ballots. As a reminder, all dues paying members are eligible to vote. The weighted voting will be calculated after Remembrance Day and finalized at the annual meeting before election ballots are handed out.

**Finally, keep January 11th open and plan to attend our 40th anniversary celebration in Gettysburg. More details will be coming following the meeting. I have heard from a few retired members but would like to hear from more. If you're in touch with or have anyone's contact info please send it to Pete and myself ASAP so we can make sure they are on the invitation list.**

Eric

## 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 Curtin, Harrisburg

Saturday, Nov. 7th, 1861.

Messrs. Editors: After a long correspondential silence I once more take the opportunity of writing to you. Our regiment is not numbered the Fifty-fifth as you have noticed on several occasions in the columns of the *Ledger*, but is the Fifty-third Regiment, Penna. Volunteers. I hope our friends will particularly notice this correction.

As far as this Camp is concerned, there is nothing of importance transpiring. The same daily routine of duty--the usual guard mountings, dress parades and regimental drills come off every day, with now and then an event of interest worth recording. There is within the bounds of Camp Curtin a sutlers store, where there can be purchased almost everything a soldier wants by paying a pretty fair price for it. Many of the men thinking that the extortion of the storekeeper was too great to be silently borne, resolved, one night last week to make a forcible entrance in the premises and help themselves to the good things within. A plot to carry out their purpose was laid, but unfortunately for the boys and fortunately for the sutler, their designs were prematurely discovered by the camp authorities, and a strong guard, consisting of several companies was detailed to protect the threatened building. After a vast amount of noise, a great deal of confusion, some blows and a number of arrests the affair was settled.

The Pottstown Band connected with this regiment have been making marked improvement since their arrival in Camp. Lieut. Stubblebine, the excellent leader, spares no pains to make it an efficient and first class musical organization. It is generally acknowledged to be the best Band in camp. It now numbers twenty-two members.

## Upcoming events –

### 2 Nov. – Monument Cleanup – Gettysburg NMP

Our annual cleanup of leaves and other debris on Brooke Avenue at the 53<sup>rd</sup> PVI's monument. Meet at the monument by 10AM and bring tools (rake, loupers, work gloves, etc). We are most often finished by noon.

### 23 Nov. - Remembrance Day Parade – Gettysburg

Annual parade honoring the dedication of the Soldiers Cemetery in Gettysburg. The NR meets up on the hill behind the elementary school each year for formation and dress parade before the parade starts. Keep tuned to the Facebook group and/or email for specific details (time to form up, etc.).

## 7 Dec. – Annual Meeting – Sgt. Fasnacht’s Home (Kleinfeltersville)

Our annual unit meeting to discuss all things 53<sup>rd</sup>... such as the 2019 season, discuss events for 2020, new and old business, etc. Keep tuned to the Facebook group and/or email for details such as meeting start time, etc. Please plan on bringing an item to share with the others for lunch.

## *Save The Date! January 11, 2020*

The 53<sup>rd</sup> 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 53<sup>rd</sup> PVI and have their contact information, please forward it to Eric and Pete asap.

## *The Civil War Merchant -*

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

## For Sale –

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

Unlined Sack Coat (approx. XL)	30.00	CD Jarnigan Great Coat (approx. XL)	100.00
Keune McDowell Kepi some brim cracking	20.00	Grey Blanket with black stripe	50.00

## Wanted –

Eric Ford – looking for another gum blanket or poncho. Contact him if you have one for sale.

*If you have not submitted your “Get To Know 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 **53<sup>rd</sup> MAX EFFORT**  
27 May Hummelstown Memorial Day Parade  
5-7 July Gettysburg GAC – 2ndary Event  
20-21 July Landis Valley Civil War Days – **53<sup>rd</sup> MAX EFFORT**  
28 July Gruber Wagon Works (Reading, PA) – **53<sup>rd</sup> MAX EFFORT**  
24-25 Aug. 53<sup>rd</sup> Gettysburg Living History – Spangler’s Spring **53<sup>rd</sup> 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 53<sup>rd</sup> PVI Monument  
23 Nov. – Remembrance Day Parade – Gettysburg  
7 Dec. – 53<sup>rd</sup> PVI Annual Meeting (Mark Fasnacht’s home)  
11 Jan. – Annual Holiday Party – Dobbin House (Gettysburg)



### 53rd PVI Contacts

President: Eric Ford ([reenactor53@gmail.com](mailto:reenactor53@gmail.com))

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Website: <http://www.53rdpvi.org>

53rd PVI Member Facebook Page: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/53rdPVI>

National Regiment Phone line: 800-777-1861 (code 61) NR Website:

<http://nationalregiment.com>

