

Company C 53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry

"The Sentinel" April 2020

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, event summaries/photos, stories, 53rd memories, etc. to me for inclusion in a future edition of "The Sentinel". Matthew Steger, editor

2020 NATIONAL REGIMENT SCHOOL OF INSTRUCTION SUMMARY

On Feb 29th and March 1st, the National Regiment held its annual School Of Instruction at the Gettysburg Firehall. It is always a good weekend of training on various aspects of the hobby. This year, there were presentations on bayonet drill, blanket rolls, NR social media marketing, swords, firearms, infantry manual of arms, wing commanders, etc. From the 53rd, in attendance were Benedict, Steger, Ford, Shick, and Mitchell. The group of NR attendees were broken up into 4 groups which rotated through the various presentations. After the NR meeting and election on Sunday, John Heiser took the group out to Wheatfield Battle Walk. Sat. evening, there was also a 'show and tell' and a 'sutler show'. Below are some photos of the presentations and the walk:

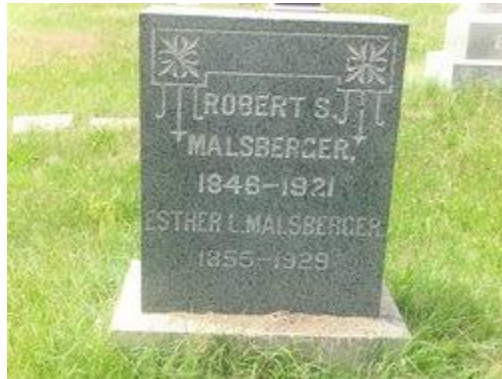




HONORING OUR FALLEN DEAD – THE MEN OF THE ORIGINAL 53RD PVI

Thanks to Marc Benedict for sharing:

John R. Kerst - born on Dec. 30, 1831. He enlisted as a bandsman in the 53rd PVI on Nov. 7, 1861 and discharged by General Order No. 91 in 1862. He died on Jan. 9, 1896 and is buried in St. Michaels Cemetery, Birdsboro, PA.



Robert S. Malsberger - born in 1846. At 15, he enlisted on Nov. 7, 1861 as a bandsman in the 53rd PVI. He was discharged by General Order No. 91 in 1862. He died in 1921 and is buried in Edgewood Cemetery, Pottstown, PA. He was a musician.



Absalom Miller - born in 1839. He enlisted as a bandsman in the 53rd PVI on Nov. 7, 1861 and was discharged by General Order No. 91 in 1862. He died in 1892 and is buried in the Pottstown Cemetery East, Pottstown, PA.

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 Regiment, P. V.,
Camp at Harrison Landing, Va.
Friday, August 8th, 1862.

Messers. Editors:—Oh! For a blackberry pie and a bowl of milk! At this particular moment we could luxuriate on it; we could charge on it furiously—we could make a flank movement and take it by surprise—we could take it by regular siege, we could put the knife to it without flinching—we could, golly, we could eat it. As to the milk, what is the (often sour) milk of human kindness, to a cold, refreshing bowl of cow's milk to a thirsty mortal. But blackberry pie and milk are “no whar;” and the star spangled banner still waves!

When the correspondential pen has been for weeks engaged in soiling pure white foolscap with the eagerly sought after and bloody details of battle, or blotting it with the murky sweat of weary forced marches, it hardly knows how to form sentences; and there appears to be a good dearth of news, when things have settled down to their present quietude. Consequently it is difficult for us to perceive anything worth writing about. It is warm in this part of Dixie—in point of fact, superlatively hot. The “light of other days” seems to have its focus here. The mercury in the glass is coquetting with the nineties, and that is about warm enough.

Our regiment has been completely new uniformed—blouses, pantaloons, shoes, stockings, caps, &c, making a better appearance on dress parade, than it has for months. The ranks are also filling up again, with those who were sick and wounded and who have returned completely cured from home hospitals. Several of the boys who were prisoners in Richmond have been exchanged, and are once more with their comrades in the companies to which they belong.

Last Saturday morning, a wild eyed, pale young man presented himself at our Hospital Department, and presented the following note to Dr. Wynne:

“On Board Schooner Isabel.”

“The bearer is one of my hands. He has been on a bad tack of drinking which has nigh drove in his bulk head, and he is bordering on Mania Potu. I recommend him to some Surgeon to give him some medicine to bring him around to a safer harbor than he is steering to now.”

Wm. Jackson, Commander,

August 1st, 1862.

The proper medicine was applied, with advice that he should alter his course, and keep a good lookout for breakers.

Andrew Missimer, of Pottstown, a member of Company A, arrived in camp yesterday from Richmond, being one of the three thousand exchanged, that came down the river and landed at this point yesterday. It will be recollected by the reader that Mr. Missimer was captured at White Oak Swamp, during the memorable battle of seven days. He gives an interesting account of his imprisonment from which we glean the following:

After our troops left White Oak Swamps, he staid behind so stay with his friend corporal Abm. Wein, who was mortally wounded (died in Richmond on the 15th of last month.) About 5 o'clock the next morning the rebel scouts, foot and mounted, made their appearance. They belonged to Jackson's command. He was taken prisoner, and forced to leave his wounded friend, and not see him afterward. There was a number more of our weary soldiers captured at the same place. When they found that the rebels were coming on them, and they would have to surrender, some of them broke their muskets, and a number of guns and cartridge boxes were thrown down a well, thus preventing them from falling into the hands of the enemy. The whole squad was immediately marched towards Richmond. As they passed along they were greeted in various ways by the citizens and soldiers. Jackson's men appear to be the most gentlemanly. Remarks like the following would be made: “Well, your bound to have your Fourth of July dinner in Richmond after all.” “You don't know when McClellan is gone to stop running—do you?” Some of the boys answered that they should “go on, he would stop today somewheres for them—he had done so every day yet.” Some of the women were very outspoken, and very fierce. One of this class of crinoline secesh, crying out for the guard to kill the Yankees, kill them on the spot, kill every one of them!” Others appeared to be really ladies, and either kept modestly silent, or spoke to them kindly. A lady pressed into the hands of one of the boys a confederate five dollar note, and a few gave bread to our hungry soldiers. A number of sutlers of our army, were captured, and our boys, greatly to the amusement of their rebel guards tantalized them, saying: “All you come in the army for was to make money of off us, now you are in for it and will have to spend some of it. They passed through the camp of the 1st Louisiana Regiment, and there saw the flag of the

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31st New York, the staff stuck in the ground upside down. But one line of breastworks was noticed, and two small half moon shaped forts, one mounting two guns and the other three. When they arrived in the rebel capitol they were marched at once to one of the tobacco warehouses along the river, a building that accommodated three thousand prisoners, there known as "Prison No. 3. The first day they had nothing to eat, the next they got a few crackers, and after that, their regular rations, which consisted of one fourth loaf of bread per day, the loafes about the size of our half dime ones, and a small piece of fresh beef without salt. The prison was under charge of Lieut. Shinn of Alexandria, who appears to have been a gentleman though an ardent secessionist. He endeavored to satisfy the wishes of our unfortunate soldiers as far as possible. Our boys are under obligations to him for favors at his hands. While there, they on several occasions saw Gen. Winder, the iron heartened superintendent of the Richmond prison houses. They were kept for eleven days in the overcrowded and poorly ventilated warehouse, when they were removed to Belle Island in the James, opposite Richmond. Here they were in tents—most of them being captured from us. There was thirty five hundred prisoners on this island, including the whole of the 14th Reserves (Penna.) and 4th N.J., and about three hundred of the Bucktails. The Tredegar iron works was opposite their camp, and every day the rebels would take cannons out to try them, and almost every day one of more of the iron dogs would burst, "then our boys would yell." I sam satisfied that there is a number of union men and women in Richmond. When any of them was taken sick on the Island, they had to tend them as best they could, as there was no doctors to call in. Everybody appeared to be anxious to get hold of our money. And dealers of almost every kind prefer our notes (treasury or blank) to Confederate script. Their officers bought up money from the prisoners, giving them six dollars of theirs for five of ours. Daily there were persons in their midst, many of them Confederate officers, bargaining and buying our "green backs." At one time they asked a rebel Captain who appeared to be very anxious to trade money with them. "Why they wanted our notes of their Confederacy was all O.K.? The officer said he had friends north that he wished to send it to, (The usual answer they gave to such questions.) Our boys told him "they couldn't see it." As they were most starved on the limited amount of rations dealt out to them, they of course purchased a number of necessaries. For coffee, manufactured of Rye, they paid \$1,00 per pound. The pure coffee is very scarce and sells at \$2,50 per pound. Molasses (poor, rummy kind) \$1,25 per quart. Butter \$1,25 per pound. Salt \$1,25 per quart. Flour 25 cents a pound. The water they drank was from the muddy James. They saw, almost every day, train loads of "conscript fathers" and sons, arriving in Richmond over the Petersburg road, armed with anything that will shoot or cut. The rebel soldiers express themselves mightily tired of the war; they say, however, we can never take Richmond or conquer them. As soon as it was heard in the rebel Capitol that three hundred thousand additional troops were called for by President Lincoln, the rebs said we could never get them without drafting. They—the rebels—have on the canal a number of little gunboats—carrying one gun. One morning they observed one of these boats coming down the canal, with a big staving in about its rear. While on the island they enjoyed themselves as best they could. In the evenings a number of them would get together and sing the Star Spangled Banner and other national airs, and they would make the welkin ring. The guards told them not to make so much noise, but appeared to like the singing. They ornamented their tents and cook houses with rough, but elaborate drawings of the Union flag, coat of arms, &c. Every morning the newsboys would bring the *Despatch* and *Enquirer* around selling them at the low price of 25 cents. per number. They are printed on half sheets of miserable paper, not as large, as a half sheet of the *Ledger*. They acknowledge that McClellan performed his retreat to the James, in a splendid manner. They curse and fear Pope, and don't like Burnside. Richmond has a desolate look—the houses are closed, and the civilians who appear on the streets have a weary look, and wear crape on their hats. Our boys received the notice that they had been exchanged and would be sent home, with cheer after cheer. They left Richmond on Tuesday noon last, and were marched down the river bank about twenty miles, to Eckert's Landing. During the tramp three of our soldiers died and one of the rebel guards. The boat left Eckert's Landing about eight o'clock, and arrived at this place on Wednesday morning. Three others of our regiment who were prisoners arrived in this exchange lot.

Last Wednesday evening at the hour of tattoo, orders came to march immediately with three days rations. The boys were quickly in ranks, and a quick line of march taken up for the front. The force consisted of the French's Brigade, Col. Brooke, commanding, and the Irish Brigade. The whole under the command of Gen. French. They marched some four miles, when Col. Brooke's Brigade was ordered forward the 53d Penna. and 64th N. Y., Capt. Bull commanding, in the advance. It was near midnight when the dark and silent woods that marks the approach to Malvern hills rose before them. Here the command was halted and the different regiments put in position. Company A, Lieut. Mintzer, commanding, and Company D, of the 64th N. Y., were deployed some five hundred yards in advance as skirmishers, covering the front and flanks. The troops then waited patiently for the rebel foe that was believed to be moving down upon our lines. But secesh kept themselves scarce, and dawn broke upon the calm night watch without a gunshot to break the stillness. On Thursday the troops were moved back to a position about two miles beyond our line of entrenchments. The Irish Brigade and three regiments of French's returned. Three regiments, including the 53d, remained on picket, and warm work it was. As they were under the necessity of being exposed all the time to the burning rays of this (whew! Hot!) Southern sun. The regiment returned to camp about 2 o'clock this afternoon.

Yours, &c., L.J.F.

[*Ledger*, August 19, 1862]

From The Desk Of The President –

Pards,

I hope that all of you are well and staying healthy. There's really not much to say at this time. As you all know, the NR Camp of Instruction and our Spring Adopt-A-Position event have been cancelled. As we look forward, I'll remain autiously optimistic that AHEC and the Memorial Day parade will continue as scheduled. If not, I'll relay the info as soon as we're notified. Should that happen, our first event will Landis Valley. I'm sure that by then we'll all be more than ready to be in the field. Until then, take a little time to prep your kit and make any needed repairs so that you'll be ready once we get the all clear to resume our hobby. Don't forget to let Matt or I know (by today – 30 March) if you wish to register for Cedar Mountain. Matt will be registering us a unit on Tuesday (3/31). After that, you will need to register yourself and the fees will increase on April 1.

I'll be glad to see all of you when the time is right. Until then, please take all of the recommended precautions so we can soon resume life as "normal".

Take care,
Eric

US Musket and Rifle Tools video-

What was issued with smoothbore and rifled muskets in the mid-1800s? Tools, tampions, wipers, etc. for various weapons. Watch this video presentation on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/ihcbe2-2wNU>

Cartridge Rolling Party –

The unit met at Sgt. Fasnacht's home on 14 March to make rounds for the 2020 season. We made 250 rounds (25 full packs) from scratch over an approx. 5 hour period which also included lunch. The assembly line included cutting paper from templates, forming the empty rounds (including cleaner rounds), filling them with powder and filler, making percussion cap bundles, and assembling them into full packs. Sgt. Fasnacht made burgers and hot dogs on the grill. In attendance were Fasnacht, Espenshade, Zinkus, Benedict, and Steger. We also have approx. 30 packs left over from the 2019 season. Thank you to all who showed up and, of course, to Mark for hosting us and the great burgers and hot dogs and other vittles everyone brought to share.



Upcoming events –

4 April -Spring Monument Cleanup - 53rd PVI Monument (Gettysburg NMP)

Cancelled – will not be rescheduled. The fall cleanup is still on the schedule for 7 November.

18/19 April – ELF Ft. McHenry Drill (Baltimore)

Cancelled

2-3 May – National Regiment Camp Of Instruction – Gruber Wagon Works (Reading)

Cancelled

16/17 May – USAHEC “Army Heritage Days” – Carlisle

Annual event at USAHEC in Carlisle showing the US military through the ages. It is a paid event assuming we have at least 6 members onsite Sat. and Sunday. We get paid a lesser amount if we only have a presence (at least 6 members) on Saturday. You may arrive Friday starting at 5PM. Otherwise, arrive by 8:30AM Saturday. Whomever the first 53rd PVI member present, please claim the 1st (northern-most) cabin for shelter. Normal kit is fine however tentage is not needed unless you plan on staying over Sat. night and want to sleep outside the cabin. Bring food although modern food is available to purchase on-site. I would also plan on bringing approx. 8 rounds although I don't have the schedule yet to know if we are supposed to fire or not this year. Stay tuned to the unit Facebook group page and email for updates as I get them.

The Civil War Merchant -

(if you have something for sale or are looking for something, submit it for inclusion in a future edition of “The Sentinel”)

For Sale –

Listed by Rick Kramer for a friend. All items in good shape unless noted otherwise. Contact Rick directly for any inquiries/questions - auktion8@comcast.net

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

2020 Calendar of Events -

~~11 Jan. Annual Holiday Party – Dobbin House (Gettysburg)~~
~~1-2 Feb Winter Drill (Landis Valley)~~
~~29 Feb – 1 March – National Regiment School of Instruction (Gettysburg)~~
~~14 March – Cartridge Rolling Party (Sgt. Fasnacht's home)~~
4 April – Adopt A Position – 53rd PVI Spring Monument Cleanup (Gettysburg) – **(CANCELLED)**
~~2-3 May – National Regiment Camp of Instruction (Gruber Wagon Works) – (CANCELLED)~~
16-17 May - USAHEC Event – **53rd PVI MAX Effort** (paid event) (Carlisle)
25 May – Hummelstown Memorial Day Parade
18-19 July – Landis Valley “Civil War Days” (Lancaster) **53rd PVI MAX Effort**
29-30 Aug – Gettysburg Living History (Spangler Spring – Gettysburg NMP) **53rd PVI MAX Effort**
12-13 Sept. – Burkittsville Re-Enactment (Burkittsville, MD) – **53rd/NR Max Effort**
17-18 Oct. – Cedar Creek Re-Enactment (Middletown, Virginia) **53rd/NR Max Effort**
7 Nov. - Adopt-A-Position – 53rd PVI Fall Monument Cleanup (Gettysburg)
21 Nov. – Remembrance Day Parade (Gettysburg)
5 Dec. – 53rd PVI Annual Meeting (Sgt. Fasnacht's home)

Secondary Events -

~~3-5 April – Lee's Last Stand Re-Enactment (CANCELLED)~~
~~18-19 April – Spring Drill at Ft. McHenry (ELF) (CANCELLED)~~
8-9 August – Cedar Mountain Re-Enactment (1st MN)
5-6 Sept. – Bedford Village (1st MN)

53rd PVI Contacts

President: Eric Ford (reenactor53@gmail.com)
Vice President: Pete Zinkus (zinkusp@gmail.com)
Treasurer/Secretary: Matthew Steger (n3ntj@comcast.net)
Newsletter Editor: Matthew Steger (n3ntj@comcast.net)
Webmasters: Steve Dillon ([steve@gofoxpro.com](http://www.gofoxpro.com)) and Matthew Steger (n3ntj@comcast.net)
Website: <http://www.53rdpvi.org>
Sergeants: Mark Fasnacht and Marc Benedict
Corporals: Mike Espenshade and Matthew Steger
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>

