

53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry

Company C

"The Sentinel" June 2025

Newsletter of The James Creek Guards



"Clubs Are Trumps!"

This Month:

1. How the First Union Troops Entered Virginia at the Start of the Civil War
2. Book Review – The Shiloh Campaign – March - April 1862
3. Original 53rd PVI Member
4. Hummelstown Memorial Day Parade Summary
5. Flag-In Event Summary
6. New Look at 53rdpvi.org
7. Upcoming Events
8. The Civil War Merchant
9. 2025 Calendar of Events
10. 53rd PVI Contact Info



I am always looking for newsletter content, so please forward your articles, book reviews, event summaries & photos, stories, etc.) to me for inclusion in a future edition of "The Sentinel". – Matthew Steger, editor

HOW THE FIRST UNION TROOPS ENTERED VIRGINIA AT THE START OF THE CIVIL WAR

William Connery, April 21, 2025, blueandgrayeducation.org



Bridge) from Georgetown, then along the Georgetown Wagon Road (now Wilson Boulevard), and camped near present-day Clarendon.

Page 1 of 8

Inside Fort C. F. Smith in 1861 in what is now Arlington, Virginia | Library of Congress

Virginia voted to secede from the Union on May 23, 1861. The first Union troops crossed the Potomac River into Alexandria County (today's Alexandria City and Arlington County) during the early morning hours of May 24, 1861. One officer reported that it was a beautiful moonlit night, and the moonbeams glittered brightly on the flashing muskets as the regiment silently advanced across the Long Bridge.

Eight Union regiments, under the command of Col. J.F.K. Mansfield, crossed the river and took up positions in Virginia. The first unit to cross was the 3rd U.S. Infantry under Maj. W. H. Wood. They moved via the Aqueduct Bridge (near the present Key

The only opposition encountered came from a few Confederate pickets at the southern end of the Long Bridge and in Alexandria Harbor. There were no casualties. The Confederate volunteer units withdrew in good order.

Robert E. Lee's Arlington House, with Union soldiers out front, in 1864 | LOC

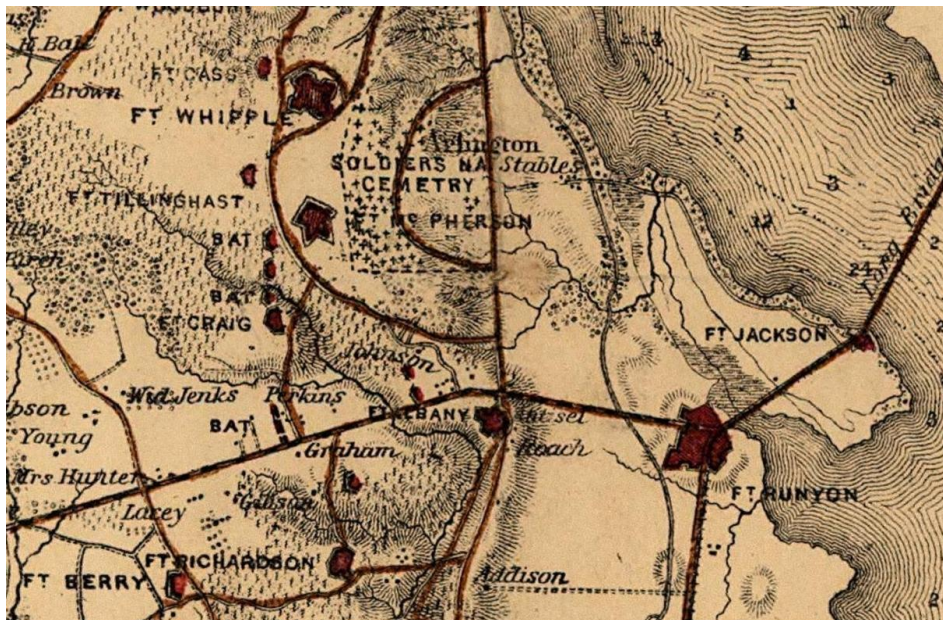
Arlington House—the recently vacated home of Robert E. Lee and his family—was occupied almost immediately. Gen. Charles W. Sandford of the 8th New York State Militia established his headquarters there.

By the time the first Union troops arrived in Alexandria County, many officials known to be Confederate sympathizers had already left. These included military and law enforcement officers, as well as the Clerk of Courts. Those who remained were either Union sympathizers or “quiet” Confederates.

On the night of June 1, 1861, Company E of the 1st Michigan Infantry was camped at Arlington Mill while on picket duty. Company G of the 11th New York Infantry, having come to relieve them, was stationed in a nearby house. Around 11:00 p.m., a squad of Virginia militiamen—reported by contemporary newspaper accounts to number only nine—approached the Union sentinels and camps and fired a volley. At least one newspaper account stated that, in the confusion, the Michigan men in the mill and the nearby Zouaves accidentally fired on each other as well as at the Virginians. In any case, the Virginians were quickly driven off. The Union forces suffered one fatality: 21-year-old Henry S. Cornell of Company G.



Following the skirmish at Arlington Mills and the “battle” of Fairfax Court House on the same day, the Union Army made no further attempt to advance into Northern Virginia until June 17, when a reconnaissance in force encountered resistance at the nearby town of Vienna.



1865 map showing Fort Craig and nearby fortifications on the Arlington Line | LOC

Construction of the earliest fortifications in Arlington required about seven weeks—until mid-July 1861. Forts were thrown up right and left, trenches were cut through pastures and gardens, forests were cut down, and troop encampments were all about. According to Union Maj. Gen. J. G. Barnard, writing later, possession of property in Arlington was taken with little or no regard for the rights of owners or occupants.

At the time, Congress and much of the public believed the war would be short. Socialites and curious civilians even gathered for the first major battle—First Manassas (Bull Run)—on July 21, 1861. But Union forces were defeated and retreated toward Arlington, Alexandria, and Washington.

After the death and brutality of that July 21 battle, both North and South realized the war would not be short.

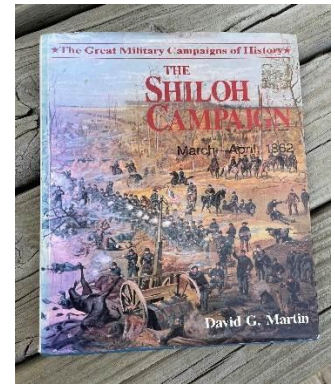
William Connery, the History Guy, is the author of [Civil War Northern Virginia 1861](#) and [Mosby's Raids in Civil War Northern Virginia](#).

BOOK REVIEW - THE SHILOH CAMPAIGN - MARCH - APRIL, 1862

Author – David G. Martin

Reviewed by – Mike Espenshade

Hardback 1987; Fairfax Press; 165 pp text; 84 pictures and 8 maps; Orders of Battle that shows casualty counts for each unit; 0 pp notes, 0 pp bibliography and index, 7 pages of useful chronology, recommended readings, poetry, Interest Groups, etc. Borrowed from my son, Troy.



The battle of Shiloh showed all of America how bloody and serious the Civil War really was. The two-day fight resulted into combined casualties totaling nearly 22,000 men. The author does a very nice job providing an easily readable and highly informative medium-level account of the Battle of Shiloh story. This story begins by explaining clearly when and where and why the battle was fought. The book includes over twenty detailed and substantial sidebars on related topics (examples: “Brother against Brother”; “How the newspapers saw the battle”, “Civil War Medicine”, and “Armament Problems”) or vignettes that illustrate the background/personality/impact of key leaders. These sidebars greatly augment and enhance the reader’s understanding of the battle itself.

The narrative is very good and constructed with the level of detail that, in comparatively few pages, allows for a sufficient comprehension of the decisions, maneuvers, terrible fighting, and events experienced. While the limited scope of this work resulted in having a shortage of first-person accounts from the fighting man, Martin does well at insightfully describing the strategies and implications of the military leaders down to the brigade level. The many pictures and accurate illustrations are well-employed to show some of the horrors and scenes the mostly green-horn troops of both sides endured.

In his memoirs, U. S. Grant wrote that Shiloh saw more intense and horrible fighting than any other action in the Western Theater, and as much as in any battle in the Eastern Theater.

The author also touches significantly on the costly mistakes (and their consequences) as committed by the top leaders Sherman, Grant, Bragg, and Beauregard. The South came so close to winning the battle on April 6, mainly due to Sherman’s errors of poor troop camp placement and ignoring/condemning his men’s many warnings of the now-happening Rebel surprise attack. Martin clearly states that the broadly-known mistakes made by Sherman (and Grant’s four-hour delay in arriving on the battlefield) would have resulted in their court martials had they lost the battle.

ORIGINAL 53RD PVI MEMBER –

Submitted by Marc Benedict

(Any typographical/grammatical errors in the article were kept intact per the original letter)

Fair Oaks Station
VA June 5th, 1862

Dear Parents,

In my last to you, I told you that we had been in a battle, but gave not particulars. You will know doubt here, many stories about it. I will now state to you how we proceeded on 31st May. We lay on the other side of the Chickahominy. At 12 o’clock we heard heavy firing. At 3 o’clock we fell in line to March. We went as far as the Chickahominy and waited for further orders. The river had risen very high. No teams could cross. Men were busy making a road for us to cross when a rider came with the word that Casey’s division was in full retreat. The word was given forward and into the water we plunged, over the half made road. The crossing took a long time, but at _____ our brigade got over, and on we went. The firing in the meantime continued. At dark, we reached the battlefield, where we learned that the enemy had been beaten back to the woods. We were marched over the field till 12 o’clock when we laid ourselves down to take a rest. two of our regiment were out on picket. We only laid 100 yards from three rebel regimens. at daylight Sunday morning June 11 we were drawn in line.

It drizzled a while and then cleared up. [easter egg – email me directly (do not carbon copy the rest of the unit) just to let me know that you saw this hidden easter egg in the newsletter. Curious how many people actually read the newsletter. Thanks.] Soon the pickets commenced firing, which was kept up for a half an hour when we marched in the woods across the railroad where the woods and brush were very thick and it was swampy. An order was given to rest. We were sitting around, not thinking of the enemy being near us. Two rebel prisoners Coming along. We were looking at the men. We heard the word _____ in the balls commence to fly. We all laid down when one of the DeCamp gave an order to us to fall back in a mistake. We fell back at peace, and when we found out that it was a mistake we soon stood upon our

Page 3 of 8

former line. The balls coming like hail over our heads. We all laid down. We did not shoot much. The second colonel said it was our own men. The left wing was shooting as fast as they could. The brush was not as thick where they were and they could see who they were. There are many things happen in a battle that I can't mention. All I will now say, is we done our duty. It was a close fight. We were not more than 25 yards apart. No artillery were engaged. Our loss is 94. You will get to hear all about it in the Pottstown papers. We are out of tobacco. The river overflows. The railroad and the cars can't come up. It rains here nearly every day. When you write put an envelope with directions on. I have no ink nor envelopes. Our batteries are engaging a mile to our right. We have to have our equipment on day and night in our often in ranks. I am sorry to say that three of our camp run and did not come back when we were in the battle. To live in Pottstown. We expect another battle every day. Tell John to send me a pots down ledger once in a while. I will not mention the men's names that run no more.

From your son,
Joseph Spang

Residence Montgomery County PA. Enlisted on 9/18/1861 as a Private. On 9/18/1861 he mustered into "A" Co. PA 53rd Infantry. He was Mustered Out on 6/30/1865 at Washington, DC

Promotions:

- * Corporal
- * Sgt. 4/1/1865

Other Information: Born in York, PA. Member of GAR Post # 595 (M. E. Richards) in Pottstown, PA. Son of Jeremiah and Catharine Fricker Spang. Wife: Emma Craver. After the War he lived in Pottstown, PA

Sources used by Historical Data Systems, Inc.:

- History of Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861-1865
- Research provided by HDS subscriber

(c) Historical Data Systems, Inc. @ www.civilwardata.com

HUMMELSTOWN MEMORIAL DAY PARADE SUMMARY

On 26 May, the 53rd once again participated in Hummelstown's Memorial Day Parade. Commencing at 10AM, we passed through the borough on our way to the Hummelstown Cemetery. Afterwards, a few of us participated in a quick lunch at the American Legion and then a debriefing at Corp. Espenshade's CW hut. Participating in the parade were: Sgts. Steger and Benedict, Corporals Espenshade and Brumbaugh, and Privates Espenshade (Troy), Thomas, Ford, Fedorshak, Dicks (Jacob), Bohnenblust, Hinceman, Orris, and Fasnacht. We were also joined by Private Greg Hale. This appeared to be our largest turnout for a Memorial Day Parade in recent memory.





We even made it into the Hummelstown Sun



FLAG-IN EVENT SUMMARY

On Saturday May 17th, Lancaster Cemetery held their annual ‘Flag In’ event for veterans buried at Lancaster Cemetery and neighboring St. Mary’s Cemetery. This event is done yearly to decorate veterans buried there with US flags prior to Memorial Day. I was the only 53rd member to participate in this event, although my wife also attended and decorated veterans’ graves with me. Those that attend receive the needed materials including flags, a list of the headstones needing flags, basic info about the soldier, and a map showing our designated area. My wife and I decorated approx. 50 veterans graves during the event, the vast majority of which were Civil War veterans.

UNIT WEBSITE'S NEW LOOK

If you haven't done so lately, I suggest you take a look at the unit website (www.53rdpvi.org) as, a month ago or so, I made some cosmetic changes just to freshen things up a little bit. I've not heard anything from any member about the website since I made the change so I don't know if members visit the website occasionally.

UPCOMING EVENTS

6-7 June – 3rd MD Living History at Bull Run/Manassas (6511 Sudley Road, Manassas, VA.).

Scheduled events begin on Saturday, but we are welcomed to arrive Friday evening if anyone is interested.

Arrive no later than 9:30AM Saturday morning. Weapons inspection will be promptly at 10AM. Camp site will be atop Henry Hill near the Visitor Center. A camp fire is permitted and there will be a large collection of firewood at the Henry House including shed/pit toilets. Bathrooms are also located inside the Visitor Center during business hours.

3 demos per day are tentatively planned so please bring plenty of rounds/caps. The weekend program ends with our last firing demo on Sunday. You can start packing up camp around 3PM. Please bring food supplies for the weekend. However, just like last year, we may be eating off-site for Saturday evening's dinner. If you plan on attending or have any questions, please contact Ron Angleberger of the 3rd MD (ronaldangleberger@comcast.net). More info will be coming. Also, if you are not already a follower of the 3rd MD's Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064805043940>), I suggest you join for more timely info on this (and other 3rd MD events). Additional information can be found here: <https://www.nps.gov/mana/index.htm>

19-20 July – Landis Valley Civil War Days – 53rd MAX EFFORT EVENT

2025 is Landis Valley Museum's 100th birthday so some special things are planned this year as part of their Civil War Days event along with our living history portion. The Hunkey Dora 1800s Baseball Club will do a townball demonstration. Also, York-native Scott Mingus, a well-known Pennsylvania and York County Civil War historian, will deliver a special lecture on the Lincoln Funeral Train, which passed through Lancaster in April 1865, honoring President Abraham Lincoln's legacy and his connection to our region.

We will be joined by our parads from other ELF and National Regiment units. Please mark this event on your calendar as it is a 53rd MAX Effort event. You may arrive after 4pm Friday [18 July] (vehicles are permitted in camp after 5pm) for setup. I will take roll call at 8:30am sharp on Saturday morning before our official weapons inspection occurs at 9am so please be onsite and fully setup no later than 8:15am. The site opens to the public at 9am. More details will be forthcoming as we get closer to the event.

As Eric has mentioned previously via email, Friday (7/18) will be Landis Valley Night at Clipper Magazine Stadium with the Barnstormers. Those of us attending will be the color guard prior to the Barnstormers game that evening. This is a request from the Barnstormers. Those participating will also get tickets to the game afterwards.

THE CIVIL WAR MERCHANT

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

For Sale –

Kerry Williard is handling the sale of Dave Swigert items for Dave's wife. Marc and I assembled an inventory list with approximate values. Some items remain. The list is current as of April 2025. Contact Kerry directly with all inquiries: shamokin71@aol.com (see the updated list below)

Quantity	Item Description	Detailed Description	Price
Uniform Clothing			
1	Trouser - Steel Blue each with suspendors	34 min waist/27" inseam-avg. condx and a little dirt w/ braces no watch pck	\$25.00
1	Dk Blue Vest Size 42	3 pockets - light wear	\$20.00
1	Colored Pattern Shirt	blue plaid with white china buttons - sun faded - good condx	\$10.00
1	White muslin Shirt	19" at shoulder 14" neck - very short in body length	\$5.00
1	White muslin Shirt	20" at shoulder 16" neck - very short in body length - cuffs are stained	\$5.00
1	Underpants - Night Pants - White	36" waist - knee stains - 25" inseam white muslin - rear repair	\$3.00
1	Lt Brown Scarf - Acrylic - Modern		\$1.00
1	Havelock - White - VG condx		\$2.00
1 pairs	Grey Wool Socks -Modern		\$2.00/pr
2	Hats - Union & Confederate for children		\$1.00
Accoutrements			
1	Scabbord -Late war 7 Rivet		\$15.00
1	Gum Blanket	some cracking with oversized grommets	\$20.00
1	Grey Smooth Face Canteen - Leather Sling Satinette Cover w/ Corded Stopper		\$20.00
1	Haversack - Tarred Black - Brittle Strap w/opwn seam		\$5.00
1	Haversack - Tarred Black w/Liner- Paint peeling Holes @ Strap Connection		\$10.00
1	Grey Smooth Face Canteen - Leather Sling Satinette Cover w/ Corded Stopper		\$20.00
Misc Items			
1 can	sno-seal (half full)		\$1.00
1	Wood Mirror - Haversack filler	sliding cover	\$3.00
1	Wood Comb - Haversack filler		\$1.00
1	Wooden button board		\$1.00
2	Coin Purses - Made from Tic Material		\$1.00/ea
1	Bag with Coffee	brown coffee	\$1.00/ea
2	Soap Bar		\$1.00/ea
1	box rifle cleaning kit	pads, steel wool, rags, etc	\$5.00
1 Pair	shoe tree		\$3.00
1	Green Army Duffle Bag		\$3.00
1	drawers for use as patches		\$1.00

2025 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- 18 Jan. - Holiday Party - Dobbin House, Gettysburg
1 Feb. - Winter Drill - Landis Valley **[53rd MAX EFFORT]**
15 Feb. - Cartridge Rolling Party **[53rd MAX EFFORT]**
22-23 Feb. - NR School of Instruction - Gettysburg
14-16 March - 160th Bentonville (NC)
4-6 April - 160th Sailor's Creek (VA) *
26-27 April - Ft. McHenry Drill
3 May - POSA Living History - Robesonia, PA
17 May - Lancaster Cemetery Flag in Event
26 May - Hummelstown Memorial Day Parade **[53rd MAX EFFORT]**
7-8 June - Manassas (ELF Event) **[NEW DATE!]**
19-20 July - Landis Valley **[53rd MAX EFFORT]**
9-10 August - Cedar Mountain *
13 Sept. - Antietam Living History **[53rd MAX EFFORT]**
18-19 Oct. - 161st Cedar Creek - Middletown, VA
15 Nov. - Remembrance Day - NR Annual Meeting and Parade *



*NR max effort events

For updated event info and other news, please check out the Facebook pages of the 53rd PVI and/or the National Regiment (links below) and check your email on a regular basis.

53rd PVI Contacts

President: Eric Ford (reenactor53@gmail.com)

Vice President: Jacob Dicks (jdwarrior@yahoo.com)

Treasurer/Secretary: Matthew Steger (n3ntj@outlook.com)

Newsletter Editor: Matthew Steger (n3ntj@outlook.com)

Webmasters: Steve Dillon (steve@gofoxpro.com) and Matthew Steger (n3ntj@outlook.com)

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

2024 Field Officers - Sergeants: Matthew Steger (1st Sgt.) & Marc Benedict

Corporals: Mike Espenshade & Michael Brumbaugh

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

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

National Regiment Website: <https://www.thenationalregiment.com>

National Regiment Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/842904089142263>

