

# 53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry

## Company C

"The Sentinel" September 2025

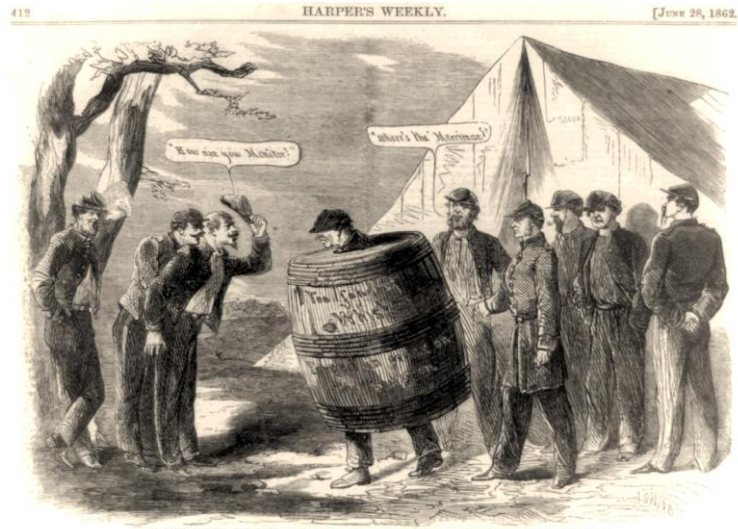
Newsletter of The James Creek Guards



"Clubs Are Trumps!"

### This Month:

1. President Benjamin Harrison's Home
2. Book Review – Failure In The Saddle
3. The Army Commander Most Despised by His Lieutenants
4. Original Letter - 1862: Adam Yeager to his "Friends"
5. Upcoming Events
6. The Civil War Merchant
7. 2025 Calendar of Events
8. 53<sup>rd</sup> 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*

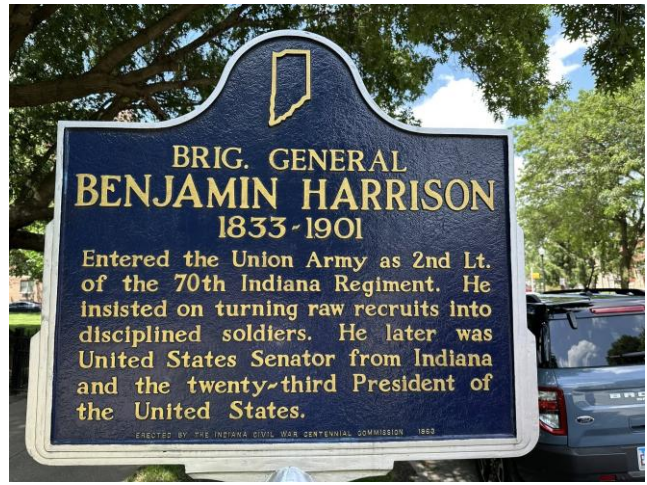
## **PRESIDENT BENJAMIN HARRISON'S HOME**

On part 2 of the trip of Route 66, my wife and I visited the President Benjamin Harrison home in Indianapolis, IN on the way home to PA. Our course, Benjamin Harrison was a Brig. General in the Civil War, after serving as Colonel of the 70<sup>th</sup> Indiana Volunteer Infantry serving in the western theatre and then as part of Sherman's March, and also served as a US Senator from



Indiana and then as the 23<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States. His Grandfather, William Henry Harrison, also served as US President but his term was very short due to dying shortly after taking office after a very long inauguration speech.

His home was quite the stately mansion and is still decorated very much like it was when Harrison lived there before and after his Presidency. It is an NPS site. Included are just a small sampling of photos that I took while there. You can see many more on my Facebook if you look at the June 21<sup>st</sup> time-frame. No flash photography is permitted inside the home so some photos may not be the easiest to fully see everything included.



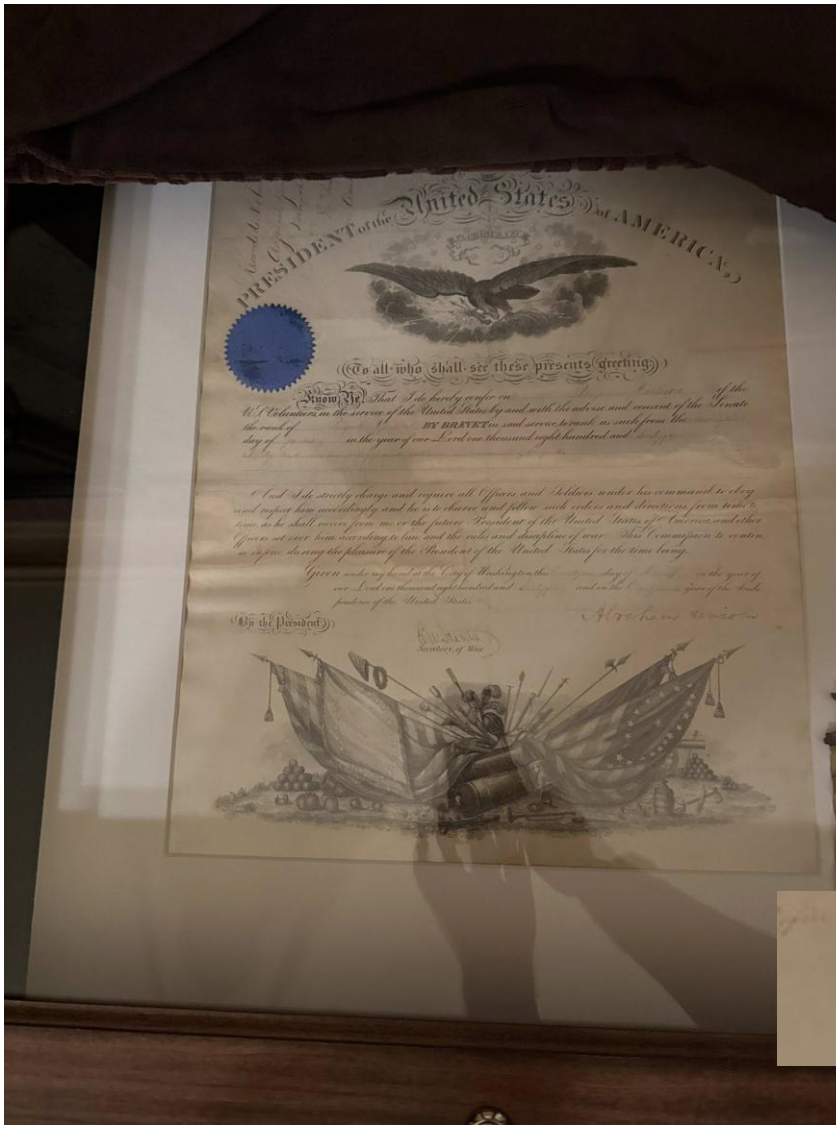
Front Parlor – carpet and some of the furniture is original.



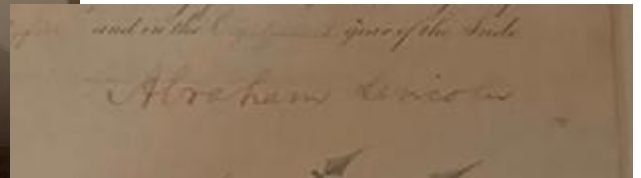
Bust and etching in the main entry hallway



Rear parlor – notice the portrait of Benjamin Harrison’s grandfather (Pres. William Henry Harrison) who died a month after taking office.



Gen. Harrison's commission to Brig. General signed by Pres. Lincoln.



Office of Harrison. The large bookcase on the right side was in payment for a legal case involving a poisoning that Harrison won (he was also a lawyer). The book case was so large, it was built in the room by his client and has never left this room.



In this dining room case includes samples of the Presidential china from the Benjamin Harrison White House. Below that are a few pieces of the Lincoln Presidential china.



This dining room table hosted many famous people before and after Benjamin Harrison's Presidential term including Gen. William T. Sherman.



This baptismal certificate is a very unique item as the ceremony was held in the White House (Executive Mansion, at that time) for one of Harrison's grandchildren. Just that fact is pretty unique. Plus, listed as witnesses and signed by each, were numerous Cabinet members of Harrison's.



The bed in which President Benjamin Harrison died in 1901.

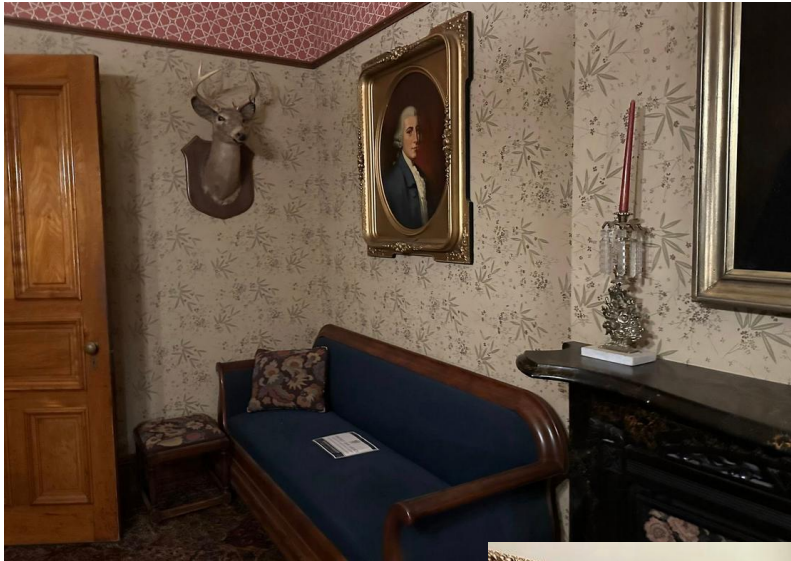


A Civil War sword of Gen. Harrison's.



A campaign poster for Benjamin Harrison.

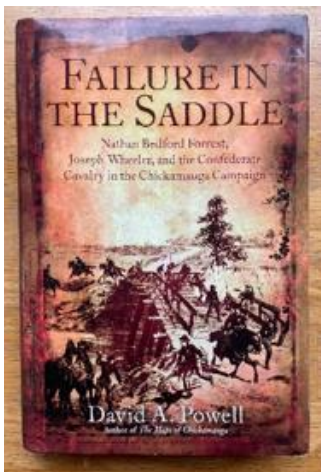
Portrait of another Benjamin Harrison, this one was Pres. Benjamin Harrison's great-grandfather who was a signer of the Declaration Of Independence, worked with George Washington to help organize the Continental Army, and was also a member of Virginia's House of Burgesses.



This 2<sup>nd</sup> level dressing room has some unique items... 2 cribs. The one on the left was one that Benjamin Harrison laid in as a baby. The one in the rear (in front of the window) was built by William Henry Harrison for his son (Benjamin Harrison's father).



**BOOK REVIEW - FAILURE IN THE SADDLE: NATHAN BEDFORD FOREST AND JOSEPH WHEELER, AND THE CONFEDERATE CAVALRY IN THE CHICKAMAUGA CAMPAIGN**



Author – David A. Powell  
Reviewed by Mike Espenshade

Hardback; 2010 Savas Beattie LLC; 240 story pp.; 13 pictures, 15 maps, notes on every page, 5 Appendices 93 pp, Bibliography 10 pp, 9 pp Index. \$5.95 pre-owned copy from Amazon.

In August 1863 William Rosecrans' Union Army of the Cumberland embarked on a campaign of maneuver to turn Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee out of Chattanooga, one of the most important industrial and logistical centers of the Confederacy. Despite the presence of two Southern Cavalry corps (nearly 14,000 horsemen) under legendary commanders Nathan Bedford Forest and Joseph Wheeler, Union troops crossed the Tennessee River unopposed and unseen, slipped through the



passes cutting through the knife-ringed mountains, moved into the narrow valleys, and turned Bragg's left flank. Threatened with the loss of the railroad that fed his army, Bragg had no choice but to retreat. He lost Chattanooga without a fight.

In his second book, Powell expertly describes in-depth the role of the Confederate Cavalry in both the Confederacy's loss of Chattanooga and the staggering number of miscues that followed up to, through, and beyond the ensuing complex Chickamauga Campaign. Powell draws upon an array of primary accounts and his intimate knowledge of the battlefield to reach several startling conclusions: Bragg's experienced cavalry generals routinely failed to provide him timely and accurate information, failed to screen important passes and river crossings, allowed petty command politics to routinely influence the ir decision-making, and on more than one occasion disobeyed specific and repeated orders from Bragg that may have changed the course of the campaign.

In addition to insightful and objective assessments on how this poor cavalry performance, largely not addressed in previous histories, influenced Bragg and his direct reports, Powell provides a delightful addition of information in 5 Appendices. They include reports of Rebel cavalry strength and losses and a Cavalry Driving Tour (with dozens of pictures). Appendix 3 is a very-revealing 1865 **Inspection Report** of Joe Wheeler's Cavalry Corps (showing how undisciplined and unmilitary his cavalrymen were: Wheeler's loose leadership style). This rabble behavior explains why many southern inhabitants were more fearful of "their own" cavalry than they were of Sherman's army. Other Appendices include a reassessment of the Forest-Bragg confrontation and "An Interview with Author David Powell".

Aware that there are more history books written about Gettysburg than all of the Western Theater combined, Powell is making headway to inform us better. His first book, **The Maps of Chickamauga** (2009), introduces him as a serious researcher and excellent author. His following works include the **Tullahoma** (2022) campaign, a detailed trilogy of **The Chickamauga Campaign** (2014, 2015, 2016), and books on the siege of Chattanooga and the battles of Lookout Mountain, Missionary Ridge, and Ringgold.

Look for my book reviews on many of these fine pieces of easy-to-read and richly-detailed histories. I know you will enjoy reading David A. Powell as much as I do. Enjoy!!

## **THE ARMY COMMANDER MOST DESPISED BY HIS LIEUTENANTS**

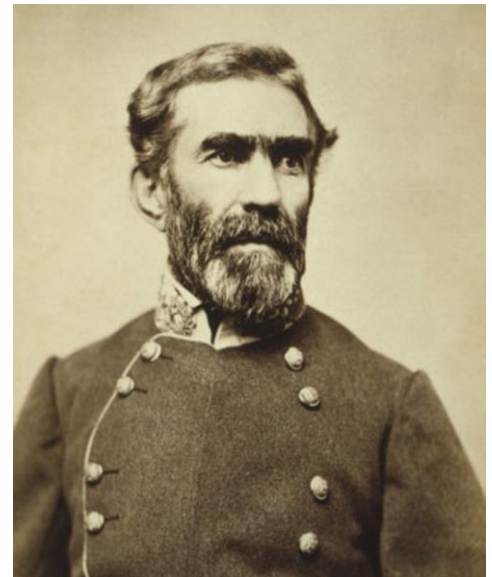
Jerry McAbee, May 20, 2024, [blueandgraveducation.org](http://blueandgraveducation.org)

American humorist Will Rogers once remarked, "I never met a man I didn't like." Obviously, Mr. Rogers never met Confederate general Braxton Bragg.

Bragg was born and raised in North Carolina. He attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, graduating fifth in the class of 1837.

As a young officer, he was argumentative with his peers and contemptuous of authority, often to a fault. Ulysses S. Grant wrote of him: In the old Army, "when stationed at a post of several companies commanded by a field officer, he [Bragg] was himself commanding one of the companies and at the same time acting as post quartermaster and commissary. ... As company commander, he made a requisition upon the quartermaster—himself—for something he wanted. As quartermaster, he declined to fill the requisition, and endorsed on the back of it his reasons for so doing." He then engaged in a series of back-and-forths with himself seeking to have the requisition filled while also denying it. Finally, he referred the issue to the post commander. Upon seeing it, the commander exclaimed, "My God, Mr. Bragg, you have quarreled with every officer in the army, and now you are quarreling with yourself."

As an Army commander, he was the embodiment of toxic leadership. Though brave and intelligent, he was as different from Robert E. Lee in the qualities that inspire and motivate men to achieve the impossible as ineptness is from genius. Where Lee would accept the mistakes of subordinates as failings on his part, Bragg was quick to blame others for the slightest transgression, never shouldering any of the blame. And while Lee was humble, gentlemanly, and engendered trust and affection, Bragg was arrogant, hot-tempered, and bred mistrust and hatred. Under Bragg, initiative was extinguished. Malice and disdain flourished. His corps and division commanders were hesitant to act except in receipt of written orders. Some would tacitly disobey his instructions, disrespectful of the man and his authority.



*Braxton Bragg—the Confederacy's most controversial general? | NPS*



*Battle of Chickamauga—one of Bragg's disasters | public domain*

In the prelude to Chickamauga, the reluctance of his lieutenants to act promptly, or at all, prevented the Army of Tennessee from crippling the Army of the Cumberland at McLemore's Cove on September 10 and 11 and from striking a devastating blow two days later at Lee and Gordon's Mill.

During the battle of Chickamauga, Bragg's incompetence to ensure his orders were properly delivered and understood all but wrecked the right wing of his Army around the Kelly farm on the second day of fighting.

Amid the subsequent siege of Chattanooga, his lieutenants virtually revolted, prompting a visit from President Jefferson Davis to restore good order and discipline. Foolishly siding with his dear friend Bragg, President Davis returned to Richmond leaving the command climate even worse than before.

That the Confederates failed to capture Chattanooga and were instead driven from Missionary Ridge is not surprising. In war, generals and leadership matter. Braxton Bragg was a colossal failure in both.

## **ORIGINAL LETTER - 1862: ADAM YEAGER TO HIS "FRIENDS"**

From [sharedandspared.com](http://sharedandspared.com) Reprinted with permission

This letter was written by Adam ("Add") Yeager, Jr. (1839-1862), the son of Adam Yeager, Sr. (1794-1868) and Sarah A. Gordon (1802-1844) of Delaware township, Juniata County, Pennsylvania. He wrote the letter to "friends Israel & wife" who *may have been* his brother-in-law, Israel Garman (1832-1869) and Sarah A. Yeager (1827-1915).

Add enlisted as a private in Co. I, 53rd Infantry on 10 October 1861. His death as a sergeant in the same company was recorded at the "Regimental Hospital" by M. J. McKinnon, 53rd Pa. Regimental Surgeon, on 8 October 1862. The cause of death was given as "chronic diarrhea & organic disease of the heart."

The 53rd Pennsylvania saw no action in the fall and winter of 1861-62. They drilled in their winter camp near Alexandria until just before McClellan's Peninsula Campaign when they were assigned to 3rd Brigade, 1st Division, 2nd Corps and transported to the reserve forces near Yorktown, Virginia. After the evacuation of Yorktown, the regiment was transported to West Point and then marched to the Chickahominy river where they assisted in building the "grape-vine bridge" just before the Battle of Fair Oaks which took place on 1 June 1862.



The following account of the Battle of Fair Oaks (Seven Pines) was penciled one week after the battle. There may be a bit of braggadocio in Add's eyewitness account of the action, but it is typical for a soldier's first glimpse of "the elephant." Add places the battle casualties at about 3,000 Union, 10,000 Confederate. In official accounts they were later estimated to be about 5,000 Union, and 6,000 Confederate—the battle being more of a draw than the Rebel rout that Add imagined.

*A scene from the Battle of Fair Oaks drawn by Alonzo Chappel*

Transcription  
Fair Oaks near Richmond  
June 8th, 1862

Friends Israel & wife,

I received your most welcome letter on Saturday last dated June the 1st. We are now near Richmond and expect every day to be in it. Last Sunday a week—June the 1st—we had a battle about 5 1/4 mile from Richmond in the woods. Our regiment was the first in the battle. In the morning, our regiment marched into the woods about three hundred yards and in the woods the command was *halt*. We halted. The command was *rest*, [so] the boys sat down and some laid down. We lay there about half an hour. Some had gone to sleep and the Rebels had formed a line of battle in the woods right along side of our regiment, not [more than] three rods of our regiment, and there they lay behind the brush and all at once they fired on our regiment [and] killed some few. The boys jumped up and let drive at them and then dropped on the ground. The Rebels let drive again and shot over us all. Our boys fired on them again. They turned and run like as if the devil was after them and we after them as hard as we could.

The gents and the ladies came down from Richmond to see the Yankees taken prisoner and marched to Richmond but in place of seeing the Yankees march to Richmond, they saw some of the Yankees' shells fly among them and killed some of their gallant young ladies and gents. I guess they thought the Yankees smelt a good bit like powder and iron and the General said their force was three to our one and we whipped them so bad they didn't know what to think of it, and they had the best men there they had. There was a great many men killed and wounded. There was only 4 wounded in our company; 95 killed, wounded, and missing in the regiment. The dead and wounded was laying very thick in the woods. Through the fight Saturday and Sunday, there was about three thousand killed, wounded, and missing of our men. The Rebels killed and wounded and prisoners was near double the number.

I am well. Good health and in good spirits. Oh yes, I almost forgot to tell you our Major [Thomas Yeager] was killed and our Colonel's horse shot from under him but still the boys fought like tigers or heroes. The news just come now that the loss of the Rebels was ten thousand. No more at present, but yours truly, — Add Yeager

Direct your letters to Washington.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

**13 September** – Antietam Living History. ELF 1-day (Saturday) living history in Sharpsburg, MD. The 53<sup>rd</sup> is supporting our fellow ELF parades. The camp will be down the hill from the visitor's center (302 E. Main St, Sharpsburg, MD 21782) across from the Dunker Church. 3 demos are scheduled (11AM, 1PM, and 3PM) so bring, at least, 20 rounds and ~30 caps. Regular kit and dog tent. You may arrive Friday evening and/or stay over to Sunday morning, if so inclined. Saturday lunch is on your own although many in the group often go out to dinner at the Red Byrd afterwards. Further questions should be directed to Ron Angleberger: [ronaldangleberger@comcast.net](mailto:ronaldangleberger@comcast.net). Please let me know ASAP if you plan on attending (and if you'll be staying over Friday night and/or Saturday) as Jimmy Thomas is putting the program together now and needs our ASAP. I plan on attending.

**18~19 October** – 161<sup>st</sup> Cedar Creek Re-enactment (Middletown, VA). ELF (of which the 53<sup>rd</sup> PVI is a part of, of course) will be the foundation unit of the National Regiment's contingent at Cedar Creek this year. Event website: <https://ccbf.us/reenactor-participant-information/>. When registering, choose "NR" as your affiliated group. I've never been to Cedar Creek but plan on going this year.

**15 November** – National Regiment's Annual Meeting/Remembrance Day Parade (Gettysburg) – NR meeting in the morning followed by dress parade and then the annual parade through Gettysburg. Afterwards, we'll go visit the 53<sup>rd</sup> PVI's monument. More details to come although Dress Parade behind Lincoln Elementary generally starts around 11:15 or 11:30AM.

## **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 –**

1. *Hard Tack and Coffee or The Unwritten Story of Army Life*; by John D. Billings; originally published 1887, facsimile reprint of 1993; hard cover; excellent condition; 408 pgs.; 211 illustrations. A must-read for any new member. Will bring to Landis Valley event. Email to claim: [oldsolger@juno.com](mailto:oldsolger@juno.com) -- \$5.00

2. 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](mailto:shamokin71@aol.com) (see the updated list below)

Quantity	Item Description	Detailed Description	Price
<b>Uniform Clothing</b>			
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
<b>Accoutrements</b>			
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
<b>Misc Items</b>			
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](mailto:reenactor53@gmail.com))

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

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

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

Webmasters: Matthew Steger ([n3ntj@outlook.com](mailto:n3ntj@outlook.com))

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

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

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

