

53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry

Company C

"The Sentinel" January 2026

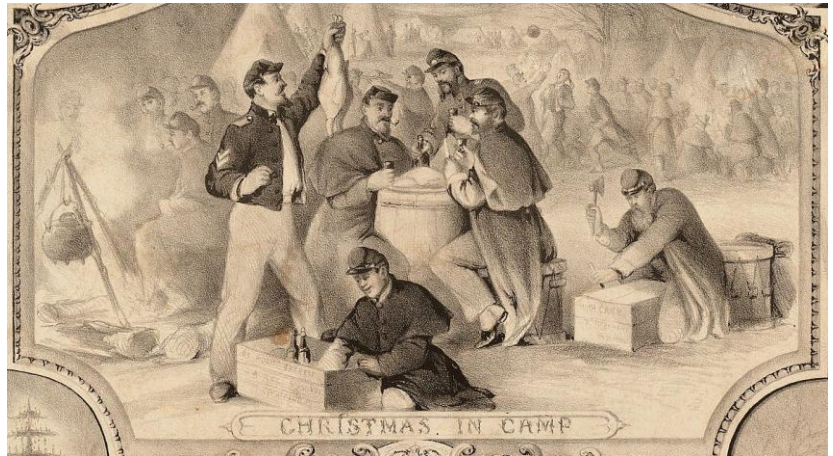
Newsletter of The James Creek Guards



"Clubs Are Trumps!"

This Month:

1. 2026 Dues are DUE!!
2. The War Officially Begins
4. Book Review: The Union Assaults at Vicksburg – Grant attacks Pemberton, May 17-22, 1863
5. Original Letter of Samuel Royer to His Family
6. PA National Guard Tour
7. "I Heard The Bells" Promo
8. Annual Meeting Summary
9. Upcoming Events
10. The Civil War Merchant
11. 2025 Calendar of Events
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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

FROM YOUR 1ST SGT./NEWSLETTER EDITOR, HAPPY NEW YEAR 2026!!!

IMPORTANT - Per our by-laws, 2026 unit dues are due by the 31 December 2025. If you have not renewed, and plan to do so, please get your payment into me!! This is why I am sending the newsletter early.

THE WAR OFFICIALLY BEGINS

By Robert Jenkins, August 5, 2022 (originally published July 7, 2020)
blueandgrayeducation.org



Bombardment of Fort Sumter | Currier & Ives

On Wednesday, April 10, 1861, Confederate Gen. Pierre Gustave Toutant (P.G.T.) Beauregard, a French Creole from New Orleans, Louisiana, who was in command of the provisional Confederate forces at Charleston, South Carolina, demanded the surrender of the Union garrison of Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. The Federal Commander, Maj. Robert Anderson, had taught artillery tactics at West Point where the French Creole was

one of his favorite pupils. Anderson, who was born at a place called "Soldier's Retreat, Kentucky," refused.

The crisis in Charleston Harbor began on December 26, 1860, when Major Anderson moved his small force of 80 men out of the other forts surrounding the harbor to Fort Sumter, which was located at the mouth of the harbor and surrounded by water. Anderson made his move in response to the action of the South Carolina Legislature to become the first state to secede from the Union on December 20, but his refusal to voluntarily surrender the fort and his defiant act of flying the Stars and Stripes over the harbor infuriated the Confederates, who felt that Anderson should peacefully vacate Charleston and board a Federal ship for the North.



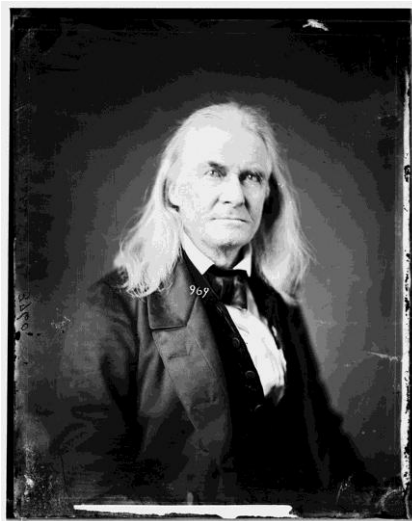
Major Robert Anderson and Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard | National Archives

Prior to his departure from office, U.S. President James Buchanan had tried to reinforce and resupply Anderson using the unarmed merchant ship, *Star of the West*, but this failed when the ship was fired upon by shore batteries on January 9, 1861. South Carolina authorities then seized all Federal property in the Charleston area, except for Fort Sumter. As the Confederates strengthened their positions around Fort Sumter, Anderson was rapidly becoming short of men, guns, food, and supplies.

Soon, six other states followed South Carolina in secession, and in February 1861, they formed a provisional

government, elected a president, created a Cabinet, and set about arming and equipping an army for the defense of the newly created Confederate States of America. Eventually, four other states would join the Confederacy. As the provisional Confederate States Army began to take shape, many of the South's leading military officers quickly resigned from positions in the United States' Government and offered their services to the Confederacy, including Beauregard, who was appointed as General and sent to Fort Sumter to expel his former teacher.

Beauregard promised to begin firing on the fort at 4:00 a.m. on the morning of April 12 should Anderson's force remain. When Friday, April 12 arrived, anxious Charleston citizens listened for sounds of the guns that would surely mark the beginning of war and the end of an era. Most did not go to bed that night in anticipation of what they expected would be the birth of a new Confederate nation and a glorious celebration. 4 A.M. came, and there was still silence. 4:15 A.M. and no sounds were yet heard. Perhaps Beauregard and the Confederates were bluffing? Or, perhaps Anderson had evacuated during the night?



Edmund Ruffin | Library of Congress

At 4:30 A.M., the booms of the thunderous cannon were heard, piercing the night sky with the streaking red-and-yellow fireballs that soared over the harbor toward the small fort. It was clear now that war was on as the unmistakable roaring continued for the next 34 hours. Anderson had ignored Beauregard's ultimatum and Beauregard's cannon had replied with a solemn resolve. Beauregard had allowed the first shot to be fired by 74-year-old fire-eater Edmund Ruffin, a native Virginian who had come to South Carolina to participate. Ruffin had preached the merits of secession for decades and, in 1858, he had founded the League of United Southerners, an organization dedicated to the creation of an independent Southern Nation. Ruffin has been largely credited with firing the first shot of the Civil War.

Unable to mount any effective reply from his outgunned and outmanned post, Anderson ordered the flag of surrender to be raised at 2:30 p.m. on Saturday, April 13. There were no casualties on either side during the four-month siege and the 34-hour bombardment, but before the Federal garrison evacuated on Sunday, April 14, one of Anderson's artillerymen was killed and three more wounded, one mortally, while firing off a 100-gun salute prior to their departure. They stopped at 50 salutes when one of the cannon exploded. Anderson and the Federals were welcomed as heroes in the North including in New York City, where the flag that they flew over

Charleston Harbor was cheered.

Following the battle of Fort Sumter, there would be widespread support from both the North and the South, and President Lincoln immediately called for 75,000 volunteers to suppress the rebellion, while

in the South, thousands of young men and boys flocked to join the Confederate Army. The Civil War had officially begun.



*Fort Sumter
storm flag | Fort
Sumter National
Monument*

[Your Editor – in researching for my upcoming book, I ran across quite a treasure of correspondences between Gen. Beauregard and Leroy Pope Walker (the 1st Confederate Sec. of War in Montgomery, Alabama) as well as correspondences between Col. Louis Trezevant Wigfall (one of Beauregard’s Aid-de-Camp) and Major Anderson. Also, some nice detailed accounts of the travel and reception of Maj. Anderson and Captain Doubleday in New York City soon afterwards.]

BOOK REVIEW: THE UNION ASSAULTS AT VICKSBURG – GRANT ATTACKS PEMBERTON, MAY 17-22, 1863

Author – Timothy B. Smith

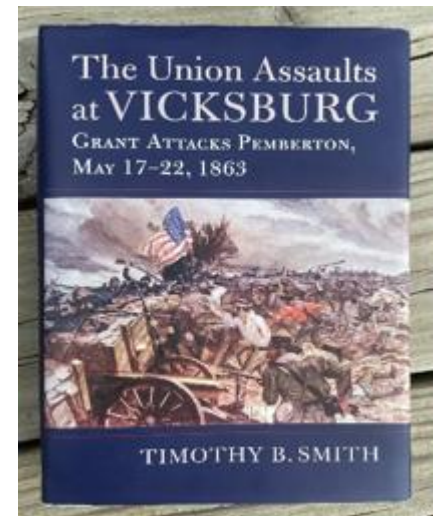
Reviewed by Mike Espenshade

Hardback; 2020; University Press of Kansas; 371 pp text; 30 pictures; 15 maps;
Orders of Battle for both armies; 57 pp notes, 41 pp bibliography and index. \$29.95
new at Vicksburg NPS Book Store.

During the third week of May 1863, and after seven months and six attempts, U. S. Grant was finally at the doorstep of Vicksburg. Here is described the attacks and maneuvers against the last major section of the Mississippi River controlled by the Confederacy – and one of the most important operations of the Civil War.

This excellent book quickly summarizes Grant’s well-executed series of maneuvers to cross the river below Vicksburg, cross east (behind) the city and defeat the Rebels in a series of significant battles at, among others, Raymond, occupy Jackson the critical capital/rail center of Mississippi, Champion Hill and the important Black River crossing on May 17th. This now isolated Vicksburg from the rest of the South by securing the city from the land (east) side. The Union navy had control of the river on the west side of the city. These Union victories resulted in low Confederate morale, high casualties, and partial cohesion as they streamed in confusion westward into already well-designed/well-prepared defensive ramparts and works. The highly confident Union army was poised to immediately storm what they thought was a weak set of defenders and works.

Establishing a day-to-day – and occasionally minute-to-minute - time line for this crucial week of Union assaults, renowned historian Timothy B. Smith invites readers to follow the events as they unfold during May 17-22, 1863. His account stems from research of the political, civilian, and military command-to-execution aspects = explained from the first-hand accounts of many scores of the participants. His finely detailed revealing of the experiences of the combat soldier is especially impressive, quantitative, and vividly described. First-hand experiences from nearly all the regiments involved are included here.



The expertly designed and constructed Confederate emplacements, very high and having mutually-covering fields of fire, forcing Union assaults to first overcome formation-prohibitive abatis, slopes and many natural ravines and ridges lower than the ramparts. This showed, despite varying Union tactics and ample artillery, that the defenses were nearly impossible to overtake by infantry assault. At times, this reader tired of reading about the futile and bloody attempts of the brave Union attackers and the consequences. All the while we learn of the frequently leery and not-assaulting Union brigade commanders who correctly interpreted the futility of frontal assault on such positions.

Read the book to learn how the successful Confederate defense of the quick, but partial Union assault on May 19 gained them the confidence that they COULD hold on. The much larger, although poorly timed, Union assaults of the 22nd came closer to breaching the lines but were stopped by the now-emboldened Rebels. The resulting 6-week siege of Vicksburg followed these unsuccessful Union infantry assaults.

The maps are good and well placed and the Order of Battle is very useful. I hope this review leaves sufficient questions and that you will read the book and have your inquiries answered. I REALLY enjoyed the book and have my questions answered.

ORIGINAL LETTER FROM THE 53RD PVI

Courtesy of [Spared & Shared: https://sparedandshared.wordpress.com/](https://sparedandshared.wordpress.com/)

1862: Samuel Royer to his Family

The following letter was written by 2nd Lieutenant Samuel (“Sam”) M. Royer (1838-1921) who mustered into Co. C, 53rd Pennsylvania Infantry on 17 October 1861. Samuel was the son of Samuel Royer (1792-1856) and Martha Patton (1802-1881) of Springfield Furnace, Blair County, Pennsylvania.

Sam was promoted to 1st Lieutenant on 9 May 1862 and he resigned his commission on 1 December 1862 to return home and pursue a career in medicine. By the time of the 1870 Census, he was practicing as a physician in Martinsburg, Pennsylvania.

In March 1862, the 53rd Pennsylvania joined in McDowell’s advance toward Manassas Junction where they passed through the battlefield of 1st Bull Run. They were then transferred into Gen. Israel B. Richardson’s Division in the II Corps and sent to the Peninsula to take part in McClellan’s drive on Richmond which began with the siege of Yorktown. Royer penned this letter shortly after landing at Ship Point but not before he had a good look at the celebrated ironclad *Monitor* at Hampton Roads which he describes in detail.

Camp near Ship Point
Sunday, April 13th 1862

Dear Mother and all,

I wrote you while on board the steamer Robert Morris but felt doubtful as to your receiving the letter though I hope you have read it ere this. We were four days on the water and to me it is altogether the preferable mode of traveling. On the afternoon of the 7th we reached Fortress Monroe and right sorry was I when we were ordered to put back. At the fortress is all life and activity and more. The place is beautiful. Here we had a fine look at the wonders of the world—the Monitor and Steven’s Battery. The Rebels said well when the Monitor was called “A cheesebox on a raft.” It looks very like a raft. The deck is flat and only about two feet of the vessel can be seen above the water, but I was told it draws thirty feet. On the deck is a round iron-plated kind of a coop about five feet high and large enough to contain four guns. This is the only armament on board. The two boiler smoke stack, whistle, and pilot house are merely seen above the deck so that it is impossible for balls to strike anything but the iron-plated coop and in the fight with Rebels, it was struck [] times, but was hurt none. Received a slight ding on the eight. It does seem impossible for such a machine to be hurt. There are no sails or any other fixins about it except what I have mentioned.

On the evening of the 7th, we headed up the bay and when about fifteen miles up, the bay grew rather boisterous and we anchored for the night. Early in the morning we again weighed anchor and moved on the Ship Point a short distance below the York River. Here we landed and moved across the country to our present camp, two miles from Ship Point.

The country here is altogether different from any I have yet seen—all one level begins—no mountains or hills. Yet there is an abundance of timber—all of one kind, pitch pine. The soil is sand and you may imagine the condition of the roads. I have seen the teams drawing their wagons along very smoothly when in an instant they would go down to the hub and when left, would go over the wheels. The principal agriculture productions of this region are corn and sweet potatoes.

I have written you heretofore of the many troops I have seen, but now I might say I have not seen many troops till [] from Ship Point to Crockett’s Mill three miles in the direction of Yorktown and as great a space north and south is one mass of infantry, cavalry, and artillery. There are a few inhabitants yet remaining in the region, all bitter secesh. They are awfully frightened at our forces. They cannot be made to believe that all the troops are from the north but really believe some are foreign. What can be the idea of concentrating such a force here is altogether

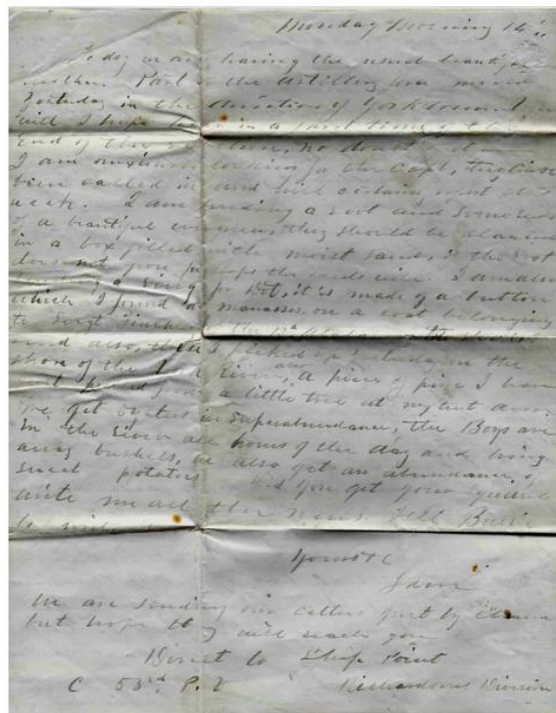
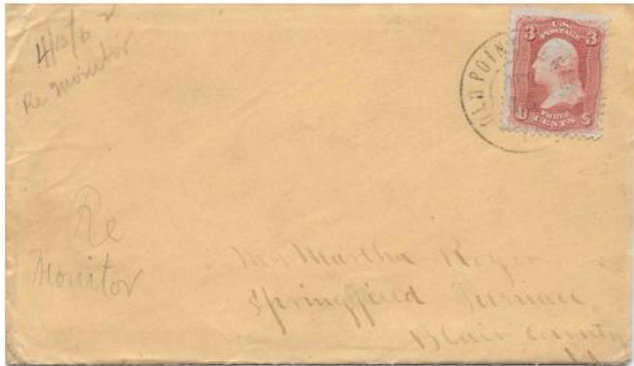
a mystery. The supposition is that Yorktown is to be besieged and all the troops made prisoner. This it is reported can [] moving up as the road is being made and no doubt ere a week, the advance will be [] the rebels. The secesh here think their forces will evacuate and burn the town. What the effect of the news from the defeat in the West will have upon Yorktown is yet to be seen. It is to be hoped that a surrender equal to days of yore will be expected of the enemies of our country at Yorktown.

Monday morning, 14th

Today we are having the usual beautiful weather. Part of the artillery was moved yesterday in the direction of Yorktown. We will, I hope, hear in a short time of the end of the rebellion, no doubt yet. I am anxiously looking for the captain. The [] been called in and will certainly report this week. I am sending a root and some seeds of a beautiful evergreen. They should be planted in a box filled with moist sand. If the root does not grow, perhaps the seeds will. I am also sending a ring for Dot. It is made of a button which I found at Manassas on a coat belonging to Sergt. Finch of the 12th Alabama. ¹ The shells I send also [which] I picked up yesterday on the shore of the York River. Also a piece of pine I have just picked from a little tree at my tent door.

We get oysters in superabundance. The boys are in the river all hours of the day and bring any bushels. We also get an abundance of sweet potatoes. Did you get your []. Write me all the news. Tell [] to write. Yours, &c., — Sam
We are sending our letters by chance but hope they will reach you. Direct to Ship Point, Co. C, 53rd Penn. Vols., Richardson's Division

¹ I believe Sam has written the 12th Alabama but if he did, then Fitch did not die from wounds received from the Battle of First Manassas because they didn't participate in that engagement. They did spend the fall and winter encamped near Manassas, however, and so may have died from sickness. Searching for soldiers named Finch in the 12th Alabama has not revealed the button owner, however. Only one John W. Finch appears in the muster rolls and he was a musician who did not die at Manassas. It's also possible that the button was taken from a garment that did not belong to a dead soldier, found on the site.



PA NATIONAL GUARD MUSEUM TOUR

On Saturday November 1st, 53rd PVI members were given a special tour of the PA National Guard's Museum at Ft. Indiantown Gap thanks to Private Travis Shick. We got to see quite a range of artifacts from prior to the Civil War up to the modern wars in the Middle East. We also got to see, up close, various tanks and other heavy equipment on display near the airfield. The museum is located in a barracks building originally constructed in the early 1940s. Thank you to Travis for this tour!

Below are a handful of photos courtesy of Eric Ford:



Historical Highlights of the Pennsylvania National Guard

1747 Overcoming the long-past tradition of Pennsylvania's founding Quakers, Benjamin Franklin leads some 800 gentlemen and merchants of Philadelphia in signing "Articles of Association" to provide for a common defense against Indian incursions and French pretensions. These "Associators" become the nucleus of the Pennsylvania National Guard. Today, the 11th and 103rd Engineer Regiments are recognized as the foundation of the Pennsylvania National Guard. Today, the 11th and 103rd Engineer Regiments are recognized as the foundation of the Pennsylvania National Guard.

1861-1865 At the start of the Civil War, five units from the Lehigh Valley rise to the nation's attention in response to an urgent plea from Congress. President Lincoln proclaims them the "First Defenders," an honor still borne by their descendants in today's 213th Area Support Group. More than 200 Pennsylvania regiments take part in the war, throughout 24 major campaigns.

1917-1918 Designated the 28th, the Pennsylvania Division is called up in the wake of America's entry into World War I. The division takes part in major campaigns in France and Belgium, suffering more than 14,000 casualties. Its legacy is carried on in the "Iron Division" from General of the Armies John Pershing, commander of all the Allied armies.

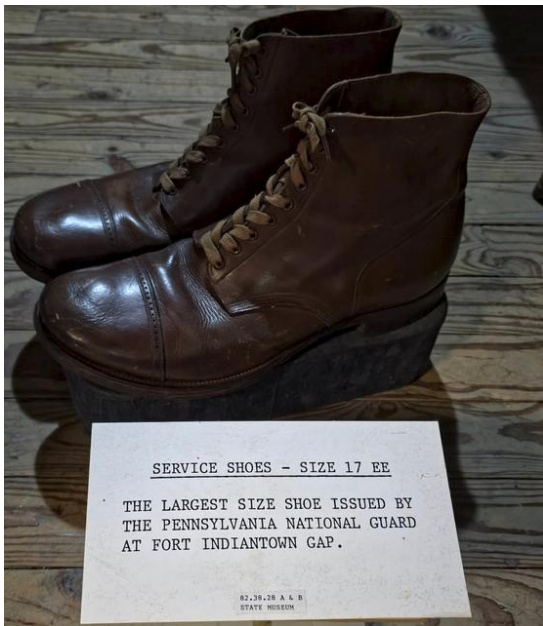
1972 Widespread flooding in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Agnes results in 48 deaths and \$3 billion in property damage. Nearly 13,000 Army and Air Guard members are called to state active duty to help with relief operations.

11 Sept 2001 For the first time in its history, both the 2001 PA Army and Air National Guard members are activated in response to the terrorist attacks in the U.S. In the 30-year history of the 11th Fighter Wing, it was not until 2002 that the unit releases ordnance in combat.

1 Sept 2005 Governor Edward G. Rendell (D-PA) mobilizes the largest state deployment in its history to support hurricane disaster relief efforts along the Coast after Hurricane Katrina. In their 30-day mission, they helped distribute 7.1 million MRE's (Meals Ready to Eat), almost 2.9 million gallons of water, 2.1 million bags of rice and conducted hundreds of security and rescue missions.







We also got to visit the final resting place of the 3 USCT veterans that Eric, Steve Dillon, and I acted as Color Guard for their re-burial at Ft. Indiantown Gap Cemetery back in 2016. This photo, courtesy of your author.



I HEARD THE BELLS - PROMO

Mark recently reposted this promo-photo from “I Heard The Bells”. Good photo of Mark and Mike in one of the scenes filmed at Strasburg Railroad. Everyone who participated in this film project a few years ago for “Sight & Sound Films” had a good time.



ANNUAL MEETING SUMMARY

On December 6th, the 53rd PVI held its annual meeting at Mark Fasnacht’s home in Kleinfeltersville. Thank you to Mark for hosting this meeting once again! President Eric Ford led the gathering in which we discussed the 2025 season, the NR annual meeting held in November, our 2026 event calendar, civil officer and NCO elections, our unit quartermaster, etc. The meeting minutes were emailed to all unit members shortly after the meeting. If you did not receive a copy, please contact Eric.

The 53rd’s 2026 event schedule is listed below under “2026 Calendar Of Events”. Please notice that this schedule has been amended slightly (since our meeting) as the NR BOD more recently voted on the NR’s 2026 schedule and have one event added that wasn’t on the schedule that we (53rd) originally voted on.

UPCOMING EVENTS

17 January – the 53rd PVI’s Annual Party/Banquet to be held at the Dobbing House in Gettysburg. Arrive early to mingle with your fellow pards and unit veterans and then enjoy dinner and a presentation. NCO and President election results will also be announced.

21~22 February – NR School Of Instruction – Held at the Gettysburg Firehall on N. Stratton Street. In lieu of a winter drill in 2026 (due to issues outside of our control), all 53rd members are encouraged to attend the NR SOI. This annual event provides instruction on drill, accurate impressions, and much more. The unit pays your \$30 registration fee and we also re-imburse for a single hotel room (1 night) at the Day’s Inn. If you’d like to reserve the hotel room, contact your 1st Sgt. for details ASAP. 2+ pards can share the hotel room if so desired. Plus, I have secured a private tour of a piece of the battlefield that most Gettysburg visitors have never heard of nor visited.... Neill Avenue (aka ‘Lost Avenue’). John Heiser and Dean Shultz will lead the group on this private tour to this rarely visited piece of NPS property on Sunday morning. If you will be attending NR SOI, please let your 1st Sgt. know ASAP.

14 March – Cartridge Rolling Party – we need to make more company rounds so we will be meeting at Mark’s home in Kleinfeltersville. Bring items for making rounds, such as cotton balls, glue sticks, scissors, string, etc. Also, bring an item to share for lunch; please let Mark know if you will be attending and what food item you will be bringing. The unit will supply the powder and percussion caps.

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. Email to claim: 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. This is not the unit's quartermaster, but a separate list of items that Kerry is selling for the Swigart estate. 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

2026 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- 17 January - Annual Party/Banquet – Dobbin House (Gettysburg)
- 21~22 February - NR School of Instruction – Gettysburg [w/ Sunday tour of Neill Avenue]
- 14 March - Cartridge Rolling Party – Kleinfeltersville
- 17~19 April – NR Camp of Instruction/Pratt St. Riots (Ft. McHenry)
- 15~17 May – Bull Run Re-enactment – Brandy Station (NR)
- 25 May – Hummelstown Memorial Day Parade
- 14 June - Hummelstown 250th Living History
- 8~9 August - Landis Valley “Civil War Days”
- 3~4 October - Seminary Ridge Museum Living History
- 7~11 October – Bulltown, WV. Organized by the 116th (NR)
- 17~18 October - Cedar Creek Re-enactment
- 14 November – NR Annual Meeting and Remembrance Day Parade (NR)

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. Our schedule is also posted on the 53rd's website.

53rd PVI Contacts (2026)

President: Alec Bohnenblust (pntbl1499@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>

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>

