

53rd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry

Company C

"The Sentinel" June 2026

Newsletter of The James Creek Guards



"Clubs Are Trumps!"

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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

BEYOND THE ETOWAH: SHERMAN'S RISKY TURN TOWARD DALLAS **PHASE TWO OF SHERMAN'S ATLANTA CAMPAIGN**

Dave Powell, March 20, 2026

blueandgrayeducation.org



Confederate entrenchments at New Hope Church, Georgia, fought May 25–26, 1864 | National Archives

From his headquarters in Bartow County, Georgia, General William T. Sherman commenced the second phase of his campaign in North Georgia on May 23, 1864, ordering the three armies under his command to cross the Etowah River—what he termed his “Rubicon.” Though not especially wide or deep, the Etowah remained a significant military obstacle, and once across it, Sherman would be operating at the outer edge of his supply line.

His supply status was rendered precarious because, instead of simply moving southeast along the Western & Atlantic Railroad toward Allatoona Pass and Marietta, Sherman intended to abandon his rail lifeline temporarily, outflank Joseph E. Johnston’s Confederate Army of Tennessee at

Allatoona, and strike westward toward Dallas. Once in Union hands, that town—the seat of Paulding County—would allow Sherman to return to the rail line at Marietta, deep in Johnston’s rear.

Into the Wilderness of the Allatoona Range

But Sherman miscalculated. South of the Etowah, his army encountered the rugged hills and deep ravines of the Allatoona Range, a southern extension of the Appalachian Mountains, all covered by dense, tangled forest. While the Etowah River valley was well settled, once out of its confines Sherman found a largely trackless wilderness. Only a handful of poor secondary roads provided the only means of transit; the going was slow.

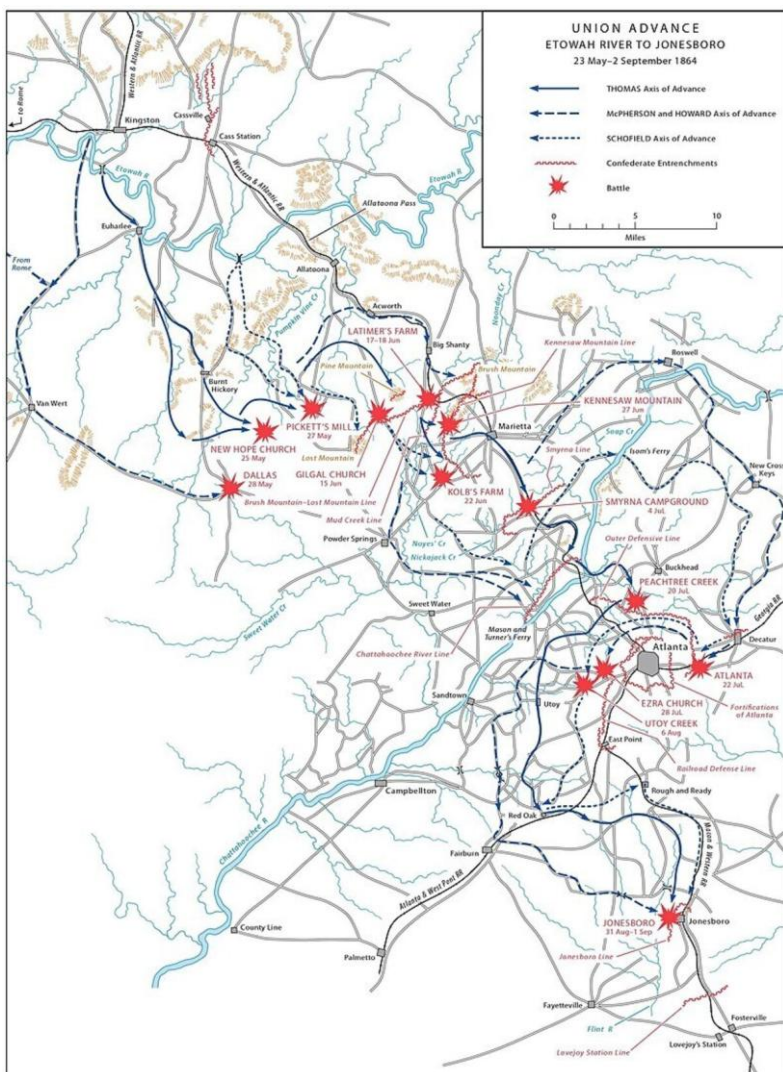
Although Dallas lay just 30 miles south of Sherman's supply head at Kingston, it took his men nearly three days to reach it. In the meantime, Johnston, alerted by Confederate cavalry, shifted west to interpose his army between Sherman and his ultimate objective, Marietta.

The Battles of New Hope Church and Pickett's Mill

The opposing forces collided along what became known as the Dallas–New Hope Line. The first encounter came at New Hope Church on the afternoon of May 25, when, at Sherman's urging, Joseph Hooker's 20th Corps attacked John Bell Hood's Confederate corps. Though the Confederates had time to erect only light defenses, Hooker's men were bloodily repulsed, suffering nearly 1,700 casualties to Hood's roughly 400.

After a day of groping eastward to find the enemy flank, Sherman hurled a part of Oliver O. Howard's 4th Corps against Patrick Cleburne's division, which had just arrived at Pickett's Mill. Once again, the Federals suffered a bloody nose: 1,600 killed, wounded, or missing, compared to about 800 Confederate losses.

While the Union Army of the Cumberland strove to overwhelm the Confederate right, the Army of the Tennessee under James B. McPherson inched the final mile toward Dallas. Despite repeated orders to attack, McPherson barely probed the enemy defenses, which were lightly held and manned by William Bate's 3,500-man division. Finally, on May 28, fearful that McPherson had departed, Johnston ordered Bate to conduct a reconnaissance in force. As a result, two of Bate's brigades became involved in a difficult, close-range slugfest, costing more than 700 casualties.



Statement and Shift to Kennesaw

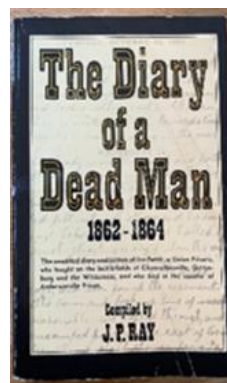
After the Battle of Dallas, neither side essayed any more direct assaults. A trench deadlock ensued, lasting until June 4, when Sherman was forced to return to the railroad to replenish his supply wagons. In turn, Johnston moved his army to a new defensive line arrayed along Brushy, Pine, and Lost Mountains in Cobb County. Sherman followed on June 10.

A map of the Union advance, Etowah River to Jonesboro, between May 23 and September 2, 1864 | public domain

BOOK REVIEW: DIARY OF A DEAD MAN- IRA PETTIT 1862-1864

Compiled by J. P. Ray

Reviewed by Mike Espenshade



Paperback; reprinted 1981 from 1976 hardback edition; Eastern Acorn Press; 395 pp text; 32 pictures; 2 maps, 2 Appendices. Military Book Club for \$9.95 (1983).

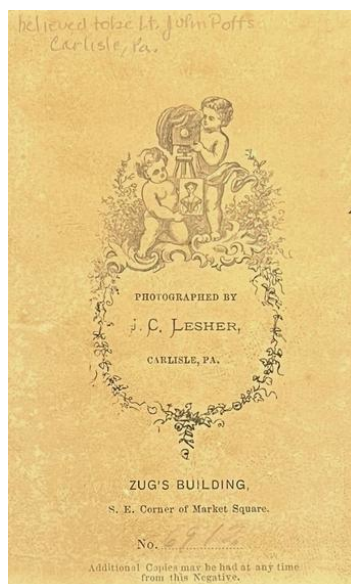
As a living historian of Union Infantry, you need to get a copy of this book and read it! By its truthful, detailed and unabashed descriptions of life in the army, this book is among the most informative 1st-hand accounts of the war. Private Ira S. Pettit, Co. F 11th Regiment of Regular US Infantry (V Corps) earnestly kept a daily diary from his enlistment (age 21) on May 29, 1862 through October 21, 1863. His diary for the balance of his service remains missing, the possibilities of “where to” are explained at length. Included are occasional letters Ira sent home to family during the period October 22, 1863 until his death in Andersonville on October 18, 1864. Near Spotsylvania, according to muster roll, Pettit was slightly wounded in the head on May 12, 1864, his birthday. Along with 44 members of his regiment, he was captured while fighting on the right flank of the Union front at Cold Harbor on June 2, 1864. Arrived at Camp Sumter, Andersonville Station, June 15th, 1864.

Ira Pettit grew up to be a hardworking, dutiful son working on his parents’ farm in western NY. This book includes his diary entries for the months before his voluntary enlistment, showing a bible-reading, and humble person. His diary and letters home reveal an unselfish, modest, and very caring man who regularly sent nearly all his army money home. He lost \$10.00 in a letter to his father when Mosby’s raiders hit a wagon train containing mail. His service mainly consisted of Camp Guard, Provost Guard, wagon or steam train guard duty – with an occasional campaign - until the Overland Campaign of 1864 started. [Note: Ira fought with the six companies of the 11th US Inf (losing 126 k/w/m of 306 men) in Gettysburg’s Valley of Death late on July 2, 1863. As was his custom, Ira never describes his experiences re: violence in either diary or letter. He only mentions walking the battlefield after the fight and seeing many dead.]

This book equips the reenactor with scores of interesting references including \$ costs of every item issued to the soldier, camp life, drill schedules, Guard Posts, train guard duty and the daily concerns of the Private soldier (ex: fatigue details, how/where to get letter/stamp material, food, etc.). On Provost Guard during Chancellorsville Campaign, Ira describes how the cattle herds kept up to the army while having tied around their necks the myriad volume of discarded overcoats, blankets, knapsacks, etc. ... and how the retreating fighting men so appreciated the now-handy returned blankets, etc. for the cold nights after the battle. Over 120 pages discuss the various people in Ira’s life that he mentions in his correspondence, including family and other soldiers ... and their war experiences, pension application activity, and postwar life.

Ira S. Pettit was not “just a number”.

CDV OF AN ORIGINAL 53RD PA SOLDIER



Marc Benedict recently found this CDV for sale on eBay showing who is believed to be 2nd Lt. John Potts of the original 53rd PA, Co. A who was wounded Antietam & Fredericksburg

ORIGINAL LETTER - 1862: GEORGE SCHEETZ TO HIS COUSIN

Courtesy of sharedandspared.com (reprinted with permission)

The following letter was written by George Scheetz (1840-1905), the son of John Scheetz (1818-1857) and Anna Catherine Sands (1815-1886) of Pottstown, Montgomery county, Pennsylvania.

George Scheetz enlisted on 21 April 1861 with Co. C, 4th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers. Upon the expiration of his term, he re-enlisted as a corporal with Co. A, 53rd Pennsylvania Volunteers. It was while serving with the 53rd Pennsylvania that George wrote this letter, just after the Peninsula Campaign while bivouacked at Harrison's Landing on the James River. Late in 1862, at the Battle at Fredericksburg, George was severely wounded and lay on the battlefield until being rescued at night. His wounds were severe enough to cause his discharge from the regiment on 10 March 1863 as a sergeant.

Prior to the battle at Gettysburg, George enlisted in the 26th Pennsylvania Emergency Regiment, serving as a 2d Sergeant. His regiment met in battle with General Ewell's troops on June 26 and pushed back to Harrisburg. During all of this time, he was still suffering from his wound. Finally in the summer of 1864, he enlisted with the 197th Regiment—a 100-day unit—serving as 1st Sergeant.

TRANSCRIPTION

Harrison Point Landing, Va.

July 6, 1862

Dear Cousin,

I received your letter and was very much pleased for to hear from you that you are all well as I am the same. I expect when the news reached Pottstown that the army had fallen back from Fair Oaks, it caused quite an excitement but it is for our own good for it is thought that the Rebels have a much stronger force there than what our Head Commander was aware of. Therefore we were obliged for to retreat until we have reinforcements or else be defeated in the attempt to take Richmond. ¹ Before our rear guard left Fair Oaks, they burnt up all that we could not get along. We had to set fire to a large pile of crackers, sugar, meat, &c. which would have fed 75,000 men for 7 days. And [besides that], a large lot of clothing had to be burnt for to prevent them from falling into the wrong hands of the Rebels. ² But enough of this.

As you have heard of our regiment being in another battle, I will give you some little account of the fights. The first battle that took place in our rear on the retreat was about 1½ miles below Fair Oaks to the left of the Richmond and Yorktown Railroad. The enemy come close to us before any firing was done on any side. At length they made their appearance out of the woods, driving our skirmishers in to the reserve, when at once grape & canister was poured into them making them run in all directions. But they formed again and marched up in front of the 1st California Regt. [71st Pennsylvania] and opened fire. But the Californians fought them well for about a half an hour. After they marched out, our regiment took their place. We did not have much for to do for our Colonel J[ohn] R. Brooke commanded us not to fire until we were all ready for to give them a good volley.

At the word, "fire," we opened and the effect of our Rifles made them skedaddle. But this wasn't the only fight we were in for we had fighting to do for 3 days. In our retreat, the solid shot and shell came in and around us thick enough for awhile. I can not give you the correct or full account as I have no time but you can see it in the Pottstown paper by next week.

As in regard of sending a Rebel sword to your father, I will do [it] if I have any chance for to get hold of one. I seen plenty of rifles, swords, &c. of which the Rebs used against us but they were all stamped U. S. I want to get something of their own stamp. No more at present. I remain your cousin. Give my respects to all at home. Read this letter to my mother. — George Scheetz

N. B. The pen you sent in your letter comes in handy as I just was in need of one. — G. Scheetz

¹ *The Fifty-third's first major battle was at the [Battle of Fair Oaks](#) on June 1, 1862. Sent into the middle of the battle, the regiment was temporarily disorganized, but was still able to drive back the Confederates. Ninety-six men killed, wounded, and missing during the battle, including Major Yeager, who was killed.*

² *George is probably referring to the large quantity of stores stockpiled at Savage's Station by McClellan's supply line that were destroyed by Union troops as they retreated to keep it from falling into the Rebels hands.*

did not have much for to do for our Col. R. Brooke commanding us not to give until we were all ready for to give them a good volley at the word fire. we spent, and the effect of our Rifles made them Ghadade. But this wasn't the only fight we were in for we had fight long to do for 3 day in our ket near the Solid shot and shell come in and around us thick enough for a while, I can not give you the correct or full account, as I have no time but you can see it in the Pottstown paper by next week as in regard of sending a Rebel sword to your father I will do if I have any chance for to get hold of one I saw plenty of Rebels Swords of which the Rebs used against us but they was all stamped U. G. I want to get something of their own Stamp no more at present I remain your cousin
 Dear Cousin
 received your letter and was very much pleased for to hear from you that you are all well as I am the same. I expect when the news reached Pottstown that the Army had fallen back from Fair Oaks it caused quite an excitement but it is for our own good for it is thought that the Rebels have a much stronger force there then what our Head Commander was



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 The first Battle that took place in our Rear on the Retreat was about 1 1/2 miles below Fair Oaks to the left of the R.R. the Enemy come close to us before any firing was done on any side at length they made their appearance out of the woods, driving our first militia in to the Reserve, when at once Grape and Canister was poured into them making them Run in all directions but they formed again and march'd up in front of the 1 California Regt and open'd fire but the Californians fought them well for about a half an hour after they march'd out our Regt took their place we

QUARTERMASTER ITEMS

The 53rd PA was contacted through our website by a woman named Margaret in western PA. Her deceased father was a re-enactor and she had some of his items in storage which she wanted to donate to us. The unit he re-enacted with had no relation to the 53rd or the NR. The items arrived and several were in good shape and acceptable authenticity-wise. I added them to the quartermaster list on the website for sale. One of the donated items was a cartridge box sling and breast plate which we were lacking from the unit kit. I added the sling/plate to the unit kit's cartridge box. I also pulled out a forage cap in good condition to add to our unit kit. I was able to quickly sell several items that we just received at the Bull Run re-enactment. We also sold our fly to the NR; Colonel Brennan will use it as his HQ fly. We can use the funds from the items sold to finish out the purchase of items needed to complete out unit kit. Of course, I thanked Margaret for her donation on behalf of the unit.

Margaret also has some rifles for sale: (1.) 1863-1864 US Springfield, Coffee bracket. 48" long Ram Rod. (2) GWY M & Campbell Patent 1862, Hamilton Union rifle, 1107 Bottom side barrel lever action for loading 29" long). Those are her descriptions as I have not seen them nor can confirm what she

actually has, but I declined those as we aren't in the market for these rifles. If you are personally interested in either of these, I can put you in contact with her. Margaret did mail me a stack of photos of the rifles.



165TH BULL RUN RE-ENACTMENT SUMMARY

The 53rd PA, along with our NR pards, participated in the 165th Bull Run Re-enactment at the Brandy Station battlefield near Culpeper, Virginia on May 15~17. Attending from the 53rd PA: Steger, Espenshade, Benedict, Thomas. It was a good event, yet rather hot at times during the battle scenarios (one each day). We drilled Saturday to practice some of the moves that we would be making during the battle scenarios. Jimmy Thomas from the 3rd MD was 1st company commander; the 53rd PA was in 1st company with our fellow ELF pards. Ross Mcnerney commanded 2nd company which consisted mostly of non-ELF NR units. Saturday night, a friendly tug-of-way match was held outside of Federal HQ amongst Federal units that wanted to supply 5 men. The NR's team did fine and won a match but lost in it's 2nd match and was, thus, eliminated from further contention. The men were happy that, for this event, parking was nearby as were our water source and sinks. At some events in the past, you may recall, all of the above were quite a distance from our camp. I have added an event page with photos on the unit website. Direct link: <https://www.53rdpvi.org/bull-run-165th-re-enactment-2026/>. Here are a few sample photos from the event:





HUMMELSTOWN MEMORIAL DAY PARADE

Due to rain, the Hummelstown Memorial Day Parade and our after-parade debriefing at Corp. Espenshade's hut were cancelled. The unit has marched in this parade for decades and we look forward to doing so again in 2027.

UPCOMING EVENTS

14 June – *Hummelstown America 250 Event*. Hummelstown Area Historical Society located at 20 North Rosanna St. 2:00 - 5:00 pm Sunday. All members are encouraged to attend this celebration - especially if guys wish to sleep overnight (the night before) in a very old (1762-1840) graveyard. **Note** – this is **NOT** same cemetery that we are in for the Memorial Day parade. This older cemetery contains 16 Rev War and 24 War of 1812 vets. If sleeping overnight, arrive after 5pm on Saturday June 13th. Stay tuned for more updates from Corp. Espenshade.

8-9 August – *Landis Valley*. Our annual Civil War Days event at Landis Valley but this year is extra special due to it being America's 250th birthday. The 53rd will be hosting other NR units so it is imperative that the 53rd have a good showing as far as attendance. Stay tuned for more updates as we get closer to August but please ensure that this event is on your calendar. **53rd MAX EFFORT!**

29~30 August – Baker Mansion (Altoona) – Dr. Jared Frederick has invited the 53rd PA to attend a 2-day event at the Baker Mansion in Altoona. Part of Company C was originally recruited from that area and there are some original 53rd veterans buried in a nearby cemetery. Rusty and Jacob did a single-day event at the site last year. The 2026 event came to us after our annual meeting so it was not on our original schedule.

19 September – 3rd MD’s Antietam Living History – One day living history at the Maryland State Monument across the road from the Dunker Church (corner of Dunker Church Rd. and Smoketown Road). 3 firing demos are planned so bring sufficient rounds (generally 7~9 rounds per demo). Be set up and ready for some drill no later than 9AM. Parking is in the grass field down the road across Dunker Church Road from the NPS Visitors Center; you can dump your gear in camp and then park your car. Any and all questions should be directed to Jimmy Thomas of the 3rd MD (jatjr424@gmail.com).

3~4 October - Seminary Ridge Living History – Our initial living history weekend on the grounds of the Seminary Ridge Museum in Gettysburg. Plans are still being worked out but please put this on your schedule to attend. **53rd MAX EFFORT!**

Non-Unit Event -

12~13 September – USAHEC (Carlisle) - It was decided to take this event off the official 53rd schedule since we have other events a few weeks before and afterwards. Several of us have expressed interested in still attending, however. Email me so I have you on my list for parking passes, other info, etc. What we get paid will be split amongst attendees.

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. 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

7 January – Annual Party/Banquet – Dobbin House (Gettysburg)
21~22 February – NR School of Instruction – Gettysburg – 53rd Max Effort
14 March – Cartridge Rolling Party – Kleinfeltersville
17~19 April – NR Camp of Instruction (Ft. McHenry) – 53rd Max Effort
15~17 May – Bull Run Re-enactment – Brandy Station (NR)
25 May – Hummelstown Memorial Day Parade
14 June – Hummelstown – America 250th Living History
8~9 August – Landis Valley “America 250 Celebration: Military Days” – 53rd Max Effort
29~30 Aug. – Altoona (Baker Mansion)
19 Sept. – 3rd MD Living History at Antietam
3~4 October – Seminary Ridge Museum Living History – 53rd Max Effort
7~11 October – Bulltown, WV. Organized by the 116th PA (NR)
17~18 October – Cedar Creek Re-enactment
14 November – NR Annual Meeting and Remembrance Day Parade (NR)
TBD December – 53rd PVI Annual Meeting



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: Alec Bohnenblust (pntbll499@gmail.com)
Vice President: Jacob Dicks (jdwarrior@yahoo.com)
Treasurer/Secretary: Matthew Steger (n3ntj@outlook.com)
Newsletter Editor: Matthew Steger (n3ntj@outlook.com)
Webmasters: Matthew Steger (n3ntj@outlook.com) and Steve Dillon (steve@gofoxpro.com)
53rd PVI Website: <https://www.53rdpvi.org>
2026 Field Officers: Sergeants: Matthew Steger (1st Sgt.) & Marc Benedict
Corporals: Mike Espenshade & Mike Brumbaugh
53rd PVI Private Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/53rdPVI>
53rd PVI Public Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61586734625435>
National Regiment Website: <https://www.thenationalregiment.com>
National Regiment Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/842904089142263>

