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Captain's Column, July 2016

I think F Company made up for its inactivity in May by the events we participated in during the month of June. We had two events on our schedule; the Cold Harbor Living History in Mechanicsville and the Cross Keys / Port Republic Battle Reenactment. They were both very good events

The Cold Harbor Living History is a standard on our schedule. We have been doing this one for years. This year it was the weekend of 4,5 June. Those attending from F Co included Mike Vice, Jack Alexander, Travis Clements, Eldridge Firth, Greg Hanson, and myself. A few members of the 4th North Carolina also helped out with this event. Each day included firing demonstrations by either the Confederate or Yankee infantry. These demonstrations were preceded by artillery firings in each case.

The high-light of the weekend is always the candle-light tour on Saturday night. It is usually very well attended. This year we were told they had six hundred visitors. The tour consists of several stops along the way where participants reenact different scenario's of the events associated with the battle. This year, once again, F Co was digging in the trenches. As the visitors (to our relief) approached, Jack did an excellent job encouraging them to get into the trenches and help us dig. But despite Jack's valiant effort, it was to no avail. But we had fun trying.

Thanks to Larry Bop for doing the narration and commands during the demos and the others

from the 4th North Carolina for helping with the event. Mike Vice was able to serve as 1st Sergeant. Second Sergeant Firth and myself served as privates as did Jack and Greg and Travis, who was actually a corporal. Privates are important. Without them we would not have a unit. All in all, nice event, decent numbers, but we could have used more support from the unit. Thanks to the guys that did show up!

The weekend after Cold Harbor (yes, back-to-back events) was the Cross Keys/ Port Republic Reenactment. This was just outside Harrisonburg and the event was for reenactors only, no public, no spectators. There was to be a battle both days with a seven mile march sandwiched in between. F Co had six members signed up for this event. They included Travis Clements, Greg Hanson, Raymond Hanson, Jack Alexander, Mike Touart (yes, Mike is back. Welcome, Mike!) and myself but not enough to be our own unit. I had contacted Glenn Courson of the Stonewall Brigade and made arrangements for us to fall in with them for this event so we would have a home for the weekend.

Those of us who could do so arrived early Friday afternoon about 1400 hours.. We met at Travis Clements's place of employment. Travis proceeded to take us on a grand Civil War tour of the area. Sites included the Port Republic Museum which has an historic lighted map of Jackson's famous Valley Campaign of which this event/ battle was a part. We also made a stop by a leather shop. Martin Harness Shop, where I was able to get my haversack repaired. He replaced the buckle strap in about five minutes and for only five dollars. Friday night was spent in the luxury accommodations of Travis' almost period home. Thanks Travis.

We got up early Saturday morning to make it to the event and to hook up with Captain Austin Williams and the Stonewall Brigade. We did this thanks to Travis' taxi service (very talented guy, that Travis) and the albeit somewhat delayed shuttle service. After finding Cap. Williams and the Stonewall Brigade we had a long unexpected break. About noon we did form up for some company drill. Afterwards, we positioned ourselves as skirmishes for what was now an early afternoon battle. After an appropriate amount of time burning powder we joined the main force and proceeded burning more powder until we had successfully repulsed the Yanks as they tried to scale the ridge we were defending. The battle having been won we started preparing for the march..

At about 1430 hours we formed up for the march to old town Port Republic. Yes we would be making the march in the heat of the day. Many of us were in full gear and with our knapsacks. So the march was going fine and we were about to take our first break when Jack decided to go skating on the pavement, not once but twice. After the second skate we loaded Jack into the wagon for a ride into town. The march continued with multiple breaks and water stops. We did eventually make it into town and to our campsite for the night. Another thing about falling in with Cpt. Williams and his unit is that these guys are all campaigners just like us. It was nice

being in camp with fellow campaigners for a change and not in "tent city".

Once we got situated, we had three tasks to accomplish. They included getting some food, planning how to get to our wagons after Sunday's battle, and cleaning our muskets. First, we went into town and got some period pizza. Then we moved our wagons to the Yankee parking area which was near where Sunday's battle would end and then we cleaned our muskets. After that it was lights out

Sunday morning we formed up early for an anticipated dress parade that did not happen. Then we prepared for the next phase of the march. Wagon service was offered to those who did not want to make the march only thing you had to come up with your own wagon. The morning march had only one stop/ water break and that was nearly at the end of the march (go figure!). But we had a nice long break at the end of the match and got to dry out and contemplate the day's battle.

At the end of the march we were reunited with those that chose not to do the march. We were told that the battle would involve us scaling up a heavily wooded mountain side to try to overtake the Yanks embedded at the top. This was just the opposite of Saturday's battle where the Yanks were trying to do the same to us. We would have two to three attempts to do so.

We finally formed up for the battle and filed into the woods in one rank and took our positions at the base of the mountain. After some anticipation the order was given to advance. So up the side we went, trying to maintain some semblance of order. We made it to the top but only very briefly before we had to retreat. So back down the mountain side we went. As we regrouped the other brigade advanced but they too were pushed back. Once again the order was given to advance and this time we went all the way. We overran the Yanks, capturing many and driving them back out of their positions. We had taken the site and won what came to be known as the Battle of the Coaling.

In conclusion, I thought this was an awesome event. It was not your typical reenactment. Yes it was challenging but there was enough down time to recover. It was nice it be with our own kind, campaigners. Depending upon your degree of involvement, it left you with a great sense of accomplishment once you got through it. I'm sorry that more of F Company was not there but I appreciate those that did participate. Great job, guys!

Next up: Fort Work Day ---16 July. See the 1st Sergeant's article. Be there!

With kindest regards,
Captain Turley

1st Sergeant's Column

Cold Harbor (3-5 June 2016)- I arrived at Cold Harbor at around 3:30 PM and negotiated w/Ed Sanders to have F Co bivouac at the turnout on the driving tour road. Then proceeded to that site to set-up my dog tent since the weather didn't appear conducive to sleeping in the open, and boy that proved to be an understatement! After enjoying an excellent BBQ dinner at Carter's Pig Pen in Mechanicsville it was back to the bivouac site. Around 7:00PM it started to rain and carried on until around 8:30PM. With that break in the rain I decided I ought to make provision for better shelter since the weather report was very ominous. A little after 9:00PM it started raining again and it came down in sheets like tropical monsoon! It went on until at least midnight, but fortunately I was able to shelter in my "tin tent", that is my truck w/a camper top and stay high and dry.

Up the next morning at around 6:00AM and off to local 7/11 for a large coffee since starting a fire was out of the question given wet wood everywhere! Troops began to appear on the scene including Capt Turley as a private soldier (due to our small participant numbers) and by 9:30AM, we had Jack Alexander, Cpl Clements, 2nd SGT Firth and Pvt Greg Hanson on hand along w/two members of the 4th NC Infantry who were falling in w/our company for this NPS event.

Firing program went fine at the Cold Harbor interpretive center and was preceded by an artillery demonstration. We participated again this year in the candle light tour and fortunately we weren't rained on! The NPS had record attendance w/some 600 visitors participating. We did our "digging" impression at entrance to trenches, and Pvt Jack Alexander turned in a singular performance trying to get assistance w/digging from the visiting public! We didn't get the program wrapped up until 11:30PM, then myself along w/Tony Turley and Eldridge Firth moved our vehicles down to the turnout in order to bivouac for the night and it was none too soon! Just about 12:45AM it began to rain and it really rained hard for at least three hours and then off and on until dawn.

While our numbers were reduced the next day for the firing program, nonetheless, we pulled it off w/the last program at 1:00PM. Then we all got organized and off for home.

Fort Work Day (16 July 2016- Sat)- Our primary work effort this day will be installing additional planking on the bridge, but also brush clearing as well since we've had great deal of rain in the last month. We'll begin work at 0800 to take advantage of cooler temperatures and finish up around 12 noon.

Everyone needs to wear work clothes including work boots w/long trouser and bring leather work gloves as we'll exposed to briars and brambles as well as ticks. Additionally bring your own water along w/any snacks you may want.

Tools needed for brush clearing include machetes, shovels, heavy rakes and hoes, bow saws and pruners, axes and hatches, brush hooks, pick mattocks, and heavy pruning hooks.

Tools for bridge work include heavy hammers and sledge hammers along w/crow and pry bars in order to pull-up planking and the nailing of bridge spikes to secure new planking to bridge frame.

We need a generator w/heavy extension cord and adequate fuel plus drills w/bits for drilling of treated planking in order to properly lay and nail the planking.

When arriving everyone needs to closely follow the dirt road around the farm fields at the Fort. Park your vehicle in an orderly manner at the entrance to the Fort. Only travel on dirt road as fields are now planted and under cultivation.

Sales Items: (1) Reference those interested in good period Civil War bandanas which were presented at the Camp of Instruction, go to southunionmills.com for an excellent source. A good bandana is a soldier's friend in the field w/all kinds of good uses as rag, nose wiper, bandage, etc.

(2) Tent Pegs- I've got excellent Civil War period style oak tent pegs which are perfect for use w/dog tent, poncho shelter or A tent. Priced at \$4.00 each. Contact me by email or phone for delivery at an F Co event.

Respectfully,
Michael L. Vice
1st SGT, F Co.
21st VA Infantry



Cross Keys

or

How to skate with no ice!

As usual I was in the thick of the action the whole Cross Keys event, but I digress. First many thanks to our tour guide and host, Travis Clements who shuttled us around from one spot to the next visiting many small but important locations of the Cross Keys/Port Republic battle actions of Jackson's Valley campaign. Travis intimate knowledge of the local layout and historical sites was invaluable. The large wall map of the historical society gave us a great overview of the terrain and the geographical challenge's that Jackson overcame, using many to his advantage during his campaign. I hope that Travis will invite us back for a closer look at the valley actions and maybe he will let us use his pool as well.

By arriving early on Friday several of us were able to scout out our Saturday morning positions, visit the "Coaling" historical site and locate the Federal camp, the ending point of Sundays action, which proved to be a blessing. As the Captain has related we were welcomed by the 33rd and took part in the early action Saturday. The march after this action got started considerably later than expected, placing us in the hottest part of the day, 90degrees + but the men of F Company moved out smartly with the full intent of marching the 4-5miles (actually closer to 7). Tony and I had marched this portion, 6 years earlier, so the real distance was no surprise. Travis, Touart, Greg, and Ray seemed determined to do their part so off we marched. Along the way, I went skating, (see below) and Travis was having foot troubles so we both caught a ride to Port Republic and waited for the other 4 to arrive. And arrive they did in good order with the rest of the battalion setting up camp for the night. Little did we know that among our marchers, one was suffering from a hidden bit of wood, identified later as the "splinter"! To his credit he made the Saturday march without complaint, charged the Federal position on Sunday (ask for the video) and for that reason, received the "bravery award" post event. (See attached). After securing dinner, we retired to clean our weapons and prepared for the morning fight.

By early morning it was clear that only Tony and I would attempt the concluding march to the "Coaling" in preparation for the attack on the Union position. It should be noted, **that only Tony made the complete march on Saturday and Sunday, Huzzah to Tony!** Touart, Greg and Ray (Travis being confined to bed) were able to arrange alternate transportation along with more than half the battalion to meet us at the "Coaling". Arriving safely, but tired at the "Coaling" we reformed and prepared for the coming battle. Filing into positions at the base of the mountain side we were soon to scale, we had the chance to see how daunting it must have been for our predecessors, 150+ years earlier. The undergrowth was very thick and when we were ordered to advance the men were funneled into bunches because of this heavy growth. At this point, our afore mentioned splinter suffer, performed brilliantly, taking the lead up the hillside, pushing aside the dense undergrowth, wounded Confederates and Federals, reaching the top on the last charge, all the while, giving no concern to his "splinter" and fatigue. Reaching the top, the Federals were swept aside, capturing some (a black Federal soldier among them) but mostly taking the position. Coming down the other side of the mountain, our troops were found to be jubilant and all thoughts of the last 2 days march were gone. Ray and Touart had strategically placed their wagons so we were able to ride back to the camp. Of course root beer was had by all before departing our separate ways. We have not received details on exactly how much money was raised but will pass it along when we do.

Attending this type of event, on original ground, which included the fund raising preservation march, is just another activity that sets F Company apart most groups. I have found that the variety of events continues to generate interest and discover new things about the Civil War and myself. Thanks to all of my comrades for a great weekend.

Ice skating: I love the design, **F** on the bottom of my brogans, but hobnails do not do well on hard, smooth surfaces; they are instead made to handle the tall dry grass that we often encounter in the field. Marching as we were on asphalt I find myself having to be cautious in taking full strides. As we approached our first stopping point, about 2miles+ into the march, we were led onto a very smooth blacktop parking lot and as you can guess, I went skating. Not once but twice, the second time tearing my pant leg, cutting my knee pretty good but worst of all twisting my right ankle. The good news was that I landed on my knapsack and did not injury my head or elbow either time. I was able to catch a ride, clean up my knee and recover enough to make the march to the “Coaling” on Sunday. I do not recommend ice skating in brogans as a regular leisure activity.

Respectfully submitted,
Pvt. Alexander

Bravery Award

This award is
presented to
Greg Hanson
for showing Bravery
while “Enduring Severe Pain”
at the Cross Keys Event
June 10 - 12, 2016



Acknowledged by His Comrades in Arms:
*Jack Alexander, Travis Clements,
Ray Hanson, Mike Touart, Tony Tarley*



The marchers of F Company

First Reenactment

I joined F Company in part to add another dimension to my interest in civil war history. Much of my study of the wars battles focused on “the big ones” such as Gettysburg, Antietam, Fredericksburg etc. I was excited to learn about the lesser known battles such as Cross Keys. Unfortunately, I was not able to arrive early enough to participate in the tour Friday, I was briefed later but it’s just not the same, maybe next time.

The dinner outing and overnight with Travis was great though, thank you Travis. This was my first battle reenactment as a new member. We were blended into another unit and they appeared motivated and knowledgeable as well. I learned a few more drill movements as things were a bit different from my experience ant the COI, particularly stacking arms. I got to talk to members from other units and enjoyed the fraternal atmosphere.

Our first engagement was interesting, although I never saw a blue uniform I knew they were there! I fired in the general direction and after a few rounds that were too close to my file partners head I figured it out and was in the groove. Then came the little Saturday afternoon stroll through the back streets of Cross Keys. In the Marine Corps we would call them “conditioning hikes”. Beautiful weather and scenery, including a stop at a wedding reception! I had been told there would be a march but was not expecting it to be as long as it was and mostly on the street. I discovered how treacherous my Brogans are on hard surfaces! Since I had just bought them and had only worn them to the mailbox and back for a break in, I ended up with quite a few blisters and sore calves. I think they are broken in now.

After a night’s sleep in basic accommodations, meaning on the ground with a blanket, we prepared for the big battle. I was surprised again by the location of the battle; we were attacking uphill through the woods. Other units were there and the men had widely varying levels of enthusiasm. After 3 attempts to go up the hill we were finally successful and routed the Yanks. It was very difficult to maintain the battle line going up the hill while dodging trees, I can see how easy it would have been for the actual soldiers to maintain their formations, I have a definite new respect for those guys now.

Overall it was an enjoyable and very educational experience for me. I realized you have to be flexible and adaptive especially working with other units. And I definitely have a new found respect for the soldiers of the 19th century. Many thanks to Travis for allowing us to stay at his place, wish I could have made the tour!

Pvt. Ray Hanson

Ode to Joe

