

Trans-Allegheny Dispatch

The newsletter of the West Virginia Reenactors Association
2015 – Edition 14 – October

Upcoming Events

More information will be added later if made available to the editor

Droop Mountain – October 9-11

Events Recommended by WVRA members

Locust Grove – October 23-25, Walkersville, Va. (ANV max effort event)

<http://www.peninsulaartillery.com/locustgrove.htm>

Guyandotte – Oct. 30-Nov. 1

<http://www.guyandotecivilwardays.com>

Next Meeting

I am assuming, if there is time, a meeting will be held at Droop Mountain Reenactment.

Droop Mountain

Droop will be held at its normal weekend October 9th through the 11th, while the leaves are in their full glory in the Greenbrier Valley. The WVRA voted overwhelmingly to hold the event, so please overwhelmingly support and volunteer to help the event. Contact Mark Tennant or Tim Glaser to volunteer.

Registration materials and more information is available on WVRA.org our official website.

2016

It is not too early to be talking about the 2016 reenacting year. Reminders to renew membership, appeals for members to volunteer for officer positions, questions about the WVRA future and will there be a Rich Mountain event next year will be forthcoming. Just a reminder that memberships expire on December 31, 2015 and officer positions stop on the same date.

Saving All of Antietam

It was certainly an appropriate atmosphere – at least in my mind it was.

The misting rain was blowing sideways, thanks to a north wind. The cloud ceiling was low. South Mountain was hidden behind the clouds, it was so low. Mists rose from some of the shallow hollows. It was an eerie gray day.

This was after all, ground where thousands of our countrymen died. Perhaps on the very spot where I stood! Perhaps their spirits were there with us.

The occasion was a ceremony to mark the acquisition of a piece of property in the center of the Antietam battlefield. A well-preserved battlefield with a big doughnut hole in the center. Forty odd acres bordered by the Dunker Church, the Hagerstown Pike, The Cornfield and the East Woods. Land where Hood's men charged and were mowed down in their heroic effort. Land where the Iron Brigade fought. Land where the II Corps blundered into Jackson's Corps.

I attended the ceremony, sponsored by the Civil War Trust (CWT), to which I lend my meager support. The CWT had raised enough money to purchase the land from the Lilli Wilson, who still occupies the aging farmhouse. Mrs. Wilson desired to see the land saved in honor of those soldiers who fought here, primarily in memory of her husband and father-in-law who served in the military. This ceremony on Sept. 30 was held to celebrate the closure of that deal. CWT plans to turn the land over to the National Park Service in the next few years. Right now, work is underway to remove non-period trees, fence lines and other items before Ms. Wilson moves out and the large work of removing the house and barn commences.

The 75-100 attendees huddled under canopies as the few speakers made very appropriate remarks. Actually, with the north wind blowing the mist sideways, very few remained totally dry. Deputy Secretary of the Interior Michael Connor was on hand to speak about the importance of preserving this battlefield. He spoke about his personal experiences visiting Gettysburg, meeting Jeff Shaara and reading the Shaaras' books. CWT President, Jim Lighthizer and Antietam Superintendent Susan Trail also made comments.

After the remarks concluded and we moved back out into the elements, I took part of a tour of the Wilson's farm tract. From the visitor's center we walked the half mile up the Hagerstown Pike to a spot where the Miller Cornfield met the newly purchased property. It was here that the gravity of the events which transpired here over 150 years ago really hit home. It was here that the Iron Brigade, Battery B, Hood's Division, and many other units fought and died. It was here on this farm described by Dennis Frye as the bloodiest ground on the bloodiest day of

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American History, that I now stood. Realizing that it was very likely that an American soldier died on this spot or very close to where I stood, I had to stop and reflect on what this ground means to our history. Were the spirits of the dead watching us now?

The picture below, doesn't do the view scape justice. This farm has always blocked the view and kept an important part of the battlefield from being visited or interpreted. This ridgeline, slight may it be, does figure in the fighting on that day. The northern part of this newly acquired field was swept over by both armies more than once. The southern part was covered by the II Corps on its way to being flanked and routed by Confederates in the West Woods.

Hopefully in 2-3 years the structures will be gone and these fields will be on their way to being restored to wheatfields that they were in 1862. The NPS is extending the North Woods to its original boundaries. The CWT is in the process of buying a small piece of property in the North Woods in hopes of restoring it also (they are taking donations for that purpose). So the best preserved major battlefield is on its way to remaining well preserved.

- C. L. Critchfield



The picture above is taken from the southern edge of THE Cornfield looking towards the Visitors Center and the Dunker Church. (not visible). This farm will be removed and the land restored as near possible, to its 1862 appearance.



Deputy Secretary of the Interior Michael Connor at the Antietam ceremony. The steady wind was blowing the mist in sideways at times while he spoke. Note that South Mountain in the background is not visible due to low clouds and foggy conditions.

Kernstown

While we are on the subject of battlefield preservation, the Civil War Trust (CWT) is also campaigning to raise money to preserve additional ground at Kernstown. There are two pieces of property, one on each side of the Virginia Route 37 bypass, that CWT is fundraising to protect. The 1st West Virginia was in the front line of both battles and I believe the remnants of the 25th was also present at 2nd Kernstown. If you are interested in donating, information can be found at Civilwar.org.

Civil War Quotes

"Secession is nothing but revolution...Still, a union that can only be maintained by swords and bayonets, and in which strife and civil war are to take the place of brotherly love and kindness, has no charm for me. If the Union is dissolved, the government disrupted, I shall return to my native state and share the miseries of my people. Save in her defense, I will draw my sword no more." Robert E. Lee to his son, January 1861

"The art of war is simple enough. Find out where your enemy is. Get at him as soon as you can. Strike at him as hard as you can and as often as you can, and keep moving on." Ulysses S. Grant

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BEATS

Last month we discussed “jonahs” and “nicknames.” This month, the much disliked “beat” is our subject. Thanks to John D. Billings “Hard Tack and Coffee or The Unwritten Story of Army Life.”

“The original idea of beat was that of a lazy man or a shirk, who would by hook or by crook get rid of all military or fatigue duty that he could; but the term grew to have a broader significance.”

Billings, a soldier in the 10th Massachusetts Battery and a Department Commander in the Massachusetts GAR, goes on from this opening to describe in some detail and with some flair the various species of beats found in the army. He starts with the “milder” form of beats such as the “men who never had any water in their canteens.” Even in camp, water could be some distance from camp and “these men were never known to go after any. They always managed to hang their canteen on some one else who was bound for the spring.” And any soldier who borrowed water from such a beat “was sure of being called upon to requite the favor fully as many times as his temper would endure it.”

Many of these same beats were always out of hardtack and “were ever on the alert to borrow.” Of course “this class did not stop at borrowing hardtack. They were not all of them particular, and when hardtack could not be spared they would get along with coffee or sugar or salt pork; or, if they could borrow a dollar, ‘just for a day or two,’ they would then repay it surely, because several letters from their friends at home, each one containing money, were already overdue.”

Another “milder” beat was the “man who sat over the fire in the tent piling on wood all the time, and roasting out the rest of the tent’s crew, who seemed to have no rights that this fireman felt bound to respect. He was always cold,” and always wearing flannels and overcoat.

“One favorite dodge of the beat was to have the corporal arouse him twice or three times before he would finally get out of his bunk; and then he would prepare to go out at a snail’s pace. Once on his beat, his next dodge was to manoeuvre so as to have the corporal of his relief do most of this duty for him; for hardly would he have been posted before the corporal must be summoned, the beat having been

seized with a desire to go to the company sink.” After that 30-minute dodge the shirker returns but uses his talents to summon the corporal once again and require him to fill in while going back to his tent for some reason.

Billings describes the rheumatic dodge in which a soldier after Fredericksburg use to gain his discharge. Fatigue duty was “another field in which the beat **played** an interesting part. I use **played** with a double significance, for he never worked if he could avoid it.” The beat would avoid all the “policing” duties such as procuring wood, cleaning camp, getting water for the company, digging and fitting of sinks and in the cavalry and artillery “procuring grain and forage for the horses.” It was hard on the good duty soldier to get stuck with a detail to procure wood where “every second or third man was a shirk or beat.” Billings added though, that when the fight came on, if any of these heroes got into it, they then appeared just as willing to bind themselves by contract to cut all the wood in Virginia, if they could only be let go just that once. These were the men who were ‘invincible in peace and invisible in war.’ ”

The author goes on to talk about other types of soldiers such as the “Profane Man” and “High-Tempered Man” and the “Paper-Collar Young Man.” From there he goes on to his ‘famous’ description of a detail that no soldier enjoyed and the “shirks, beats, and men unskilled in manual labor” exhibited the most “artful dodging and ignorance....The detail in question was one made to administer the last rites to a batch of decessed horses.” Artillery and cavalry units lost “a large number of these animals in winter, which, owing to the freezing of the ground could not be buried until the disappearance of the frost in spring, but by that time, through the action of rain and sun and the frequent depredations of dogs, buzzards, and crows, the remains were not always in the most inviting condition for the administrations of the sexton.” Billings’ description of the who event is rather entertaining and comical as the “Paper-Collar Man” and “Profane Man” react in ways that you would expect. Billings closes the scene by saying...“I must drop the curtain on this picture. It has been said that one touch of nature makes the whole world kin. Be that as it may, certain it is that the officer, the good duty soldier, the recruit, and the beat, after an occasion of this kind, had a common bond of sympathy which went far towards leveling military distinctions between them”

- C. L. Critchfield

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WVRA Officers 2015

President – Mark Tennant

Vice President – Bill Brisendine

Treasurer – Tim Glaser

Secretary – Jack Rush

Newsletter editor - Chuck Critchfield*

Website – Peter Baxter*

1st W. Va. Rep – Chuck Critchfield

25th Va. Rep – Chris Johnson

1st Va. Cavalry – John Brasuk

Artillery – Sam and Connie Krafft

TASAS – Diane Tennant

* Non-voting member of executive board

email some announcement to all members, I send it to the unit reps for distribution.

Elizabeth Swiger!!! - In case you are reading the Dispatch, your emails keep coming back undeliverable. If you have a new email address, please send to me.

Please do not send any correspondence to the PO Box in Buckhannon. Membership information can be sent to me. Remember you must be a member of record to qualify for membership benefits. To be covered under the respective insurance policies that the 1st West Virginia and the 25th Virginia infantry units participate in, you must be a member of record.

The newsletter is being sent by email to members of record who provided a VALID email address. It is posted on the WVRA website also. It is mailed to anyone who pays the \$15 mailing costs. It continues to be my plan to publish related articles of interest in addition to the items mandated by our by-laws (meeting minutes, treasurer's report, etc.).

Yours truly, has no connection to the TASAS-WVRA Facebook page and takes no responsibility for it. Nor do I have any responsibility for the WVRA Facebook page. I would suggest that the TASAS-WVRA Facebook page seems to have more up to date information.

Please contact your unit rep (listed above) with any questions about your unit.

As always, if anyone has anything for the Dispatch, send it along. I will consider it.

Editor's Corner

Hunter Lesser's thank you note in the last issue raises questions that have been tossed about by the WVRA in recent years. Does our future lie in more living history, tours, etc.?

A big thank you to Peter Baxter, who continues to provide valuable support to the production of the *Trans-Allegheny Dispatch*, and.....valuable support to WVRA.org

OK, I realize not many folks are reading this newsletter. I get very little feedback from anyone about the newsletter. However, I will make my appeal anyway. We need to start thinking about 2016 now!

Once again friends, because this has come up again, I email the newsletter to 5 separate email groups. They are the 1st W. Va., 1st Va., 25th Virginia, Artillery and TASAS. In addition, I email to the Friends of the WVRA. What this means is this: I don't have one encompassing email list to all members. Yahoo will not let me do this. If my email list is that big, it treats the email as SPAM and it wouldn't go out. Also, the Friends list is a list I have been rebuilding myself. So there are probably a number of "Friends" that used to get the newsletter who are no longer receiving it. When I get requests to

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The views expressed here are not necessarily the views of the WVRA

WVRA website - wvra.org

Facebook – [WVRA](#) – [TransAllegheny Soldiers Aid Society](#)

Chuck Critchfield – editor

608 Skyview Drive

Clarksburg, WV 26301

Ccritch608@yahoo.com