

2008 Gettysburg After Action Report

This is a difficult after action report to write. So many people contributed to the success of the event, so many made sacrifices that went above and beyond the call of duty. I hesitate to mention any names because I will fail to mention some very worthy folks who deserve to be named for their efforts.

But.....here goes:

Planning-this was a well planned event. Attending three meetings prior to the event (including the trip when Jim Dedman and I drove in a blizzard on a police-closed I-70), the planning was extensive and contingency plans existed for every possibility. It paid off during the event!

Registration-This was effortless for me and I heard no complaints from anyone.

Campsite-WOW!-It was, in my opinion, the best location possible. I regret the 1st Brigade encountered some poison ivy in portions of their camp. My walk through their area in the early spring did not reveal any problem...probably because it was too early for it to bloom. My apology to anyone who was affected. (On the other hand, the field we drilled in was covered with milkweed, the juice of the plant cures the effects of poison ivy. Nature always provides our needs.)

Camps-They sure looked like an army on the march. No company streets and lots of shebangs reflected a Division who was told to halt and pitch their camp. Good job, lads. I personally saw few modern items and thought everyone pitched in to maintain a military appearance.

The 3rd Division-Smaller than planned due to various causes, the 3rd had nothing to apologize for. The two brigades functioned well and it was difficult to tell that they had never done this on such a scale before.

3rd Division flag-That beautiful flag that flew at headquarters and on the battlefield was provided by Keith Harrison, at his own expense. The brigade commanders were asked to take up a collection from volunteers to help offset the cost. Hopefully, some of you felt the pride that flag stirred inside you and gave a little donation. If you still wish to chip in, send it to me and I will get it to Keith. Thanks goes to Marvin who carried the flag without faltering. He really demonstrated unfailing loyalty.

Division staff-You guys would be amazed to know the details Keith, Stan and Jim had to deal with. Granted, it was all military oriented and mostly authentic, but the volume and the never ending reports were burdensome, though necessary. They really did a great job. Jim had tire troubles on the way home and it took 20 plus hours.

Old/new friends-Did you know we had troops from England, Germany and Sweden in the ranks? Men traveled from 14 states to march with the 3rd. Many new friendships were created and old

ones renewed. The 2nd Wisconsin arrived en masse by bus. Boy, when they walked into camp it was a sight to behold. It seemed like there was no end to the column of new arrivals.

Ticks-I pulled 6 off of me and many folks had to deal with the little critters. I am not aware of any major problems-but they were a constant threat and nuisance. Mobile dandruff.

1st Michigan Engineers-these guys never cease to amaze me. As you know, they built the Dave Shackelford Memorial Bridge and the Alan Baldwin Memorial Approach. It really made it much easier to cross the creek for the two Brigades to interact. They also brought a field forge and was seen using it to make metal items that were needed at the time. Their conduct in the battles was flawless and reliable.

Brigade commanders- Will Eichler and Craig DeCrane did such a fine job, it was tough to remember they had never been Brigade commanders before. I apologize for any impatience on my part...I simply forgot that was your first time because of the fine manner you handled your troops. Will had to leave early Sunday and Tom Downes took over 1st Brigade and it was his first time as well. Craig, You were right regarding that bet we made on Sunday and I owe you a beer.

Division drill-You guys made reenacting history with your three Division level drills. Never before has that been done. Division reviews and parades, yes. But the drills you did were the first for the hobby and will set the standard for other organizations. The square on Sunday was simply awesome. As I told you, there were at least 13 squares formed in the real war and that drill showed you the time it takes to get one formed. Now imagine a couple of thousand cavalry galloping at you.

The massed volleys were beyond description and demonstrated what a real regimental volley would have sounded and looked. It certainly gave me a...um, uh,.....typical male response to a stimulating experience.

Battles-well, we had our share of action, that's for sure. All in all, they went well and without serious problems or injuries. I am told the counter-attack on Sunday was to simulate the success the 8th Ohio had in pushing the Confederates back....but because they overlapped the position of our 8th, we had to make the attack as we did. Sometimes the effort to replay historical events have to be more by concept rather than literally. I notice on the reenacting forums that everyone is trying to take credit for burning the Bliss Farm prior to Pickett' Charge. Rest assured, it was our 8th Ohio and the entire venture under the command of Tom. The other units were there to support the 8th because they were there historically.

The road-a rough and rutted road outside our camp caused at least two debilitating injuries. Our Division clerk, Don Everett and the captain of the 2nd Wisconsin both were hurt when they fell on the road. The organizers response was to bring in a bulldozer, a front end loader and several loads of gravel. It looked like a major road construction project and within an hour of bringing it to the attention of the army commander, we had an interstate-like lane running to the battlefield.

My second star-many laughs were the result of several good-natured folks providing several versions of stars to play along with my indignant demand for my second star as a result of promotion to Major General. Thanks for the pranks and laughs.

General Baldwin-I am telling you guys, this man went out of his way to make us "westerners" feel welcome and comfortable. On Friday night, when a TP shortage struck our 11 portajohns, he pulled a 20 out of his pocket, gave it to one of his staff and ordered them to go to Wal-Mart and buy some. He called me at 10 PM that night to tell me the purchase had been delivered to our camp. Think about that...the Army Commander taking the time and effort to address our problems personally. He is a good friend and deserves your thanks...he certainly has mine.

Army Staff-these fellows did an exemplary job of providing support to the various Divisions in the course of the weekend. I was even able to convince one of them that battalions have spaces between them. Thanks, fellows, for all that you did.

Guard duty-everyone chipped in and pulled their weight in providing guards for Division Headquarters. Many fell prey, though, to the question of "Will a guard surrender his weapon if asked by a Division staff officer or commander?". Let's just say that many learned not to relinquish their weapon to anyone while on duty. My apologies if anyone was embarrassed by their blunder..it was an effort to test their resolve and meant to be somewhat good-natured training. Probably the most amazing incident was when the Sergeant of the Guard emphatically told the guards to not give up their weapon to anyone, including the General. While he stood there and within a minute of his speech, the guard gave me his musket upon request.

RJ Samp-bugler extraordinaire-This man moved and motivated the Division with his bugling all weekend. It is one thing to move a Division but another to have such a talented man to move it by bugle! Thanks, RJ, for your efforts, injured knee and all.

Authenticity-Personally, I never observed any blatant violation of the authenticity standards of the event. While far from perfect, I feel like it was a dramatic improvement from the past and a good sign for the future. Most, if not all, seemed to appreciate the prevalent attitude of the hobby of improving your impression. All are urged to never cease your efforts to improve your personal impression.

Personal sacrifices-The most moving story came from a member of the 19th Indiana, Company A who learned his father passed away. Efforts to obtain a rental car or a flight were unsuccessful. After consulting with his family members, this unselfish man refused to make the other 8 men who drove out to the site to have to give up their experience. Please keep his loss in your prayers. I still tear up when I think of his anguish.

Summarizing the AAR, I am sure I have left out some folks who deserve much praise. There is likely to be a supplemental report issued soon. Thank you for all that you did. Never forget the pride in our hearts as the 3rd Division marched onto the field.

Former Brevet Major General, now just plain old Colonel, Dave.

