

2013 (150th) Gettysburg After Action Report

GENTLEMEN OF THE 3RD DIVISION:

The long awaited and much anticipated 150th Gettysburg is now a thing of the past. It may be in the past but it will be long remembered for many reasons.

First, the many units and umbrella organizations that combined to create the Division demonstrated how differences, standards of authenticity and personal politics can be placed on the shelf for an event in order to provide the men in the ranks an experience that will never be forgotten or duplicated.

The 856 man Division performed exemplary service in the camps and on the battlefield. The awesome sight of this five battalion, two brigade dark blue column snaking its way out of the camp and onto the battlefield brought goosebumps to everyone.

Now for the hard part...recognizing individuals or units that greatly contributed toward the success. I am not able to do justice and fear I will omit someone or a unit that was as important to the event as anyone that is mentioned.

Division staff-Enough cannot be said about this great group of men that ran that Division like a small town and ensured the smooth-flowing, effective operations. Keith Harrison must be singled out for his unending dedication to the planning and execution of his role. Frankly, I believe that no one could have done the job as well. Men like Stan Hurt, Trie Shelhart, Rob Rock worked tirelessly to assure the Division was fully operational. I bet you did not know the Division staff suffered 6 real casualties that took men out of service for a little while and even two for the rest of the event. That is a higher percentage than the companies in the Division.

Our cook, provided by the ever present 1st Michigan Engineers, Bill, the man that provided my horse and arranged for cavalry escorts from time to time, RJ Samp, our bugler that made reenacting history by moving that Division all weekend and all by the bugle. That 1/2 mile (+/-) march, in battleline in the second battle was absolutely textbook. Watching from my vantage point, the Division marched, halted, marched some more and changed directions.....and all by the bugle. Ed Fredricks, our Divisional drummer overcame his physical problems to insure the Division was served. That kind of unselfish acts was demonstrated time and time again by many individuals.

The event staff and Federal command staff could not have been more kind or helpful. Never (and that is a word we are warned not to use) did a request to Army command be denied.

My early departure required many to assume roles to which they were not accustomed. Thanks goes to Earl Zeckman for stepping up when asked. An example of the dedication to do this thing right....not one guard mount for Division Headquarters was missed. Everyone rolled up their sleeves and did this thing right.

Watching the Black Hats march into battle was amazing. Of course, I don't what unit marching into battle did not bring the feeling of awe. The Guard battalion conducted themselves like, well, the Guard battalion and that should say it all. The Army of the Wabash conducted themselves like veterans despite this was their first effort as part of a Division. Earl's boys and the Illinois fellows were as solid as a rock.

It is difficult to end this since the experiences, sights, conversations, interactions and so on and so on were of a magnitude that I simply cannot describe. It is one of those "You cannot understand if you were not there types of experiences. Oh, and I can't forget the cadet on Division staff, Shane Paige, whose youthful excitement and enthusiasm brought many old memories back for some old timers who had forgot what it was like to be that young and that excited about things we now take for granted. Perhaps there is a lesson in life there.

Thank you is not enough. I cannot find the words that express my respect, humbleness and downright, open mouthed awe in what everyone did to create that Division. The men in the ranks are the most selfless, dedicated and committed reenactors in the nation. When you encounter a veteran of that 3rd Division, extend your hand and say, "thanks" for without that man with the musket, the 3rd Division would not have existed.

Forever indebted to you, Dave Shackelford

Colonel Dave Shackelford