

Jackson, MI, August 2015, After Action Report

So much to say in regards to Jackson...let's start at the beginning. What many people did not see was the tremendous amount of planning that went into the event before anyone even stepped a foot on the grounds. Special thanks goes to Thomas Berlucchi, as he set up multiple teleconferences including via GoTo Meeting (sharing computer screens) to give the event the maximum chance of success.

Subsequent to that, but still even prior to the event, Keith Graham Harrison was there laying out the company streets, and the Marines were there laying out the civilian camp, so by the time most of us were there, it looked pretty organized!

Friday night we conducted an officers meeting and, much like Hastings, we reviewed the schedule as well as the drill maneuvers we were going to do. I think this was time well spent as the drill on Saturday was simply outstanding. I often find that at any event, I'll have one of the drills and one of the battles I like the best, and they are typically on opposite days. This weekend was no exception, but I'll get to the battles soon enough. I had two of my sons (Rob Roy – (22), and Ray Van (20), at Headquarters as well to assist, which was very enjoyable for me.

Our staff was amazing, we had the likes of Keith Harrison as Chief of Staff (more on him later), Nathan Malone as Sergeant Major, my 'go to' Right Wing Commander Dave Bauman, Denny Whiting did a great job as Left Wing Commander with his Great Lakes Battalion boys, and I had the pleasure of getting to know Robert Rock who's service was invaluable as Aide-de-Camp. I didn't really get a chance to meet the rest of his family, but his daughters were there as well. Special thanks to the artillery wizardry of Jim Newkirk, and although he was only 'on our side' Saturday, I have come to have a high regard for Kevin Yeager's cavalry skills. I also would be remiss if I didn't mention music...boy how important music is. We had a one drummer that popped in for a partial day (not really sure what happened to him), but a young man whose last name I didn't catch, but his first name was Jonathon, was arguably one of the best at giving a beat to march to I have heard in a long time, and was there for most of the weekend.

After drill on Saturday we moved into battle preparations, including a rousing prayer by Reverend Charlie Buckhahn (wow that man can pray...). As we formed up, many were surprised and delighted to see Dave Shackelford take the field as 'Commander Emeritus' for the battle on Saturday. Dave marched out with us. Although it went 'well', it was not my favorite of the two battles. It was too over scripted with too many last minute changes, and frankly I don't enjoy that kind of set up. Colonel Nick Medich was gracious enough to come over and provide some guidance as to how we might move him off the field, only underscoring the fact that the man is a class act. We came out and pushed the Rebels off the field and that was basically that. One thing I have begun to rely on time and time again, is the solid performance of my 'bookend' companies, Marty Walker and the 3rd Michigan boys on the right, and Scot Spiekerman and his Zouaves on the left...I can't tell you how assuring it is to see them there. Also performing good work with some punches in the middle were Captains Russ Paul

, J.R. Schroeder , and several more. After the battle, the event organizers had set up a special ceremony to honor Dave Shackelford, Nick Medich, and (although he didn't know it at the time), Keith Harrison. (This would not be the first time we had something planned for Keith he was not aware of). Jackson recognized all three men and provided them plaques for all of what they have done for Jackson and for re-enacting.

We marched back to camp with a planned parade later in the evening. Again, tip of the hat to the Rebel Army, they came over to link up with us for the Parade which actually was a ceremony to recognize Keith. What can you say about a man who has given so much, so selflessly, for so many years? Keith walked among the men after he was given a pistol as recognition of his service.

On Sunday we formed up for drill and this drill went well, just not quite as smooth as Saturday's. I hold myself responsible for that, as I think a 'do different' for me will be to have a brief Officer's meeting BOTH Friday and Saturday to review drill concepts. Also before Sunday's battle, I also had the pleasure of meeting Russ Paul's wife for the first time.

Sunday's battle (at least for me) was a bit more loosely scripted but more enjoyable. I have to say I feel like I am really in sync with Greg Van Wey (the Confederate Commander on Sunday) in terms of how we have battles flow. I am looking forward to working with him more and more. We ended up getting pushed off the field Sunday, but I think we bloodied their noses at bit before we did.

If nothing else, I am incredibly excited about the Cumberland Guard and the direction it is taking moving forward. I received a lot of positive feedback and offers of assistance.

Many thanks to all of you who shouldered a musket for Guard Mount, it is very much appreciated. I'd also like to extend an invite to 'All Ya'All' to consider coming down to Hartford City, IN on October 9, 10, 11 2015. Find more details at <http://hartfordcitycwdays.com/>

Thank you for letting me be a part of your weekend.

Colonel Van