

## 2018 (155th) Gettysburg After Action Report

Before too much time elapsed, I wanted to jot down a few notes about the event. As is probably and typically my fashion, I'll start with some general comments and 'thank yous', some things I learned and should have done differently, and some comments about the event itself.

Two of my three sons and I caravanned over Wednesday night to the event with Mark Benning and his son Conrad William Benning and we arrived Thursday late morning. I had some concern immediately as there was limited signage indicating camping logistics. Things were settled and discussion began as it related to the march to the 'remote' site. In the end it was decided, in no small part due to some weather forecasts, that we would do the march in the morning and march into Friday's battle.

Friday morning started off overcast and muggy. The march Friday morning was marked with constant starts and stops by a 'guide' who clearly had no idea where he was going. We eventually made it to the first stop and had to insist on water being brought to us. Our next stop was a farm house where the owners seemed thrilled to have several hundred re-enactors stop (as well as urinate) on their lawn. Once into battle, 1st company (AOW commanded by Ian Fulford) did a great job refusing the flank perhaps 10 or 20 times. 2nd company (commanded by Marty Walker) ripped off some killer volleys. With artillery in front of us, we became tired of being targets and quickly went down and captured the guns. The troops to our right (I believe they were USV) wanted to spend 15 minutes dressing their lines while under attack, so Ian again wheeled and refused the flank (but boy did the USV line look great...). The USV folks eventually retired off the field, and our exposed right flank and weakened numbers compelled us to retire. General Zeckman suffered a mortal wound during the battle. Given the action, battalion drill was cancelled for the day. Eventually spotty rain turned into a sunny day with a light breeze.

Friday afternoon's battle allowed us to be joined by two companies of troops from Bernie's Division. Great group of guys. We formed up and parked in the shade briefly, then marched into the battle. The battle was quite chaotic, as the Left Wing (under Howard Morgan) expertly wheeled into the flank of the Rebs who were attacking the Army of the Ohio. Somehow the General stole my Right Wing (under Denny Whiting) to support the right flank of the Army (not cool), and at one point I was taking random companies and plugging them into our lines. I am pretty sure our Battalion was doing all the fighting that day. It was another hot battle. Friday evening saw the temperature's cool down to the point where blankets were needed at night.

Saturday morning, we had an 'extra special' reveille at 5:40a provided by Mark D. Heath (thanks Mark!) ☺. Just now getting to our first battalion drill, we were joined by Ben Cwayna's 6th Michigan boys who would prove their mettle later in the day. The drill was done well and we also worked with our Reb counterparts on the hand to hand portion of the scenario. My voice became a bit...limited..during this drill and I had to utilize the Adjutant and Sgt. Major as my 'nice voice' and 'mean voice'. The battle for the morning was the Wheatfield. We marched up to the wall and had some back and forth with the Rebs and eventually retreated as Ben and his men performed their scenario. When we came back we went to the extreme right of the Army (because hey...they needed us again...) and pushed the Rebs to the wall.

Saturday evening the battle was 'Attack The Stone Wall'. We marched out in front of the stone wall and watched the first line of Federals fight and break (we knew why we were there...). We fought hard. We had a small Federal Battalion dispatched to our right (it took them a few minutes to get there), and then the battalion on our left, broke. We were pushed back behind the wall and had to do a little dance (sorry...) to get un-inverted. After doing so we (again) went to the far right to save the Army and rolled up the Rebel left flank as the battle was ending. Saturday evening, we formed for Parade (did I mention I LOVE Parades??) and that ended the formal activities for the evening.

The battle on Sunday (for as hot and heavy as all the other engagements were) was very brief for us. We watched the Rebs throw themselves on the wall (probably some pretty good views from our lines) as we fired into the flank of the charging Rebel hoard.

It was a great showing for the GAR, you can see some pretty impressive video of us on various Facebook pages. Thanks to all the music staff, Sgt. Major William Behrman, and especially Major Greg Swank (we could not have done any of this without them). Our Wing Commanders were outstanding, and our company commanders were second to none. It was great to see Douglas McComas and Scot Spiekerman leading 2nd Company. The MDM fellas were just awesome to work with. Many companies 'shared' leadership during the event which you might think would make it challenging, but it didn't. Also, special thanks to Aaron Sells who was my 'rock' on the left side, great job Aaron. Andy / Barry / Randy were awesome as 6th company, and Greg did an outstanding job as well.

I always like to take a few minutes and talk about things I did wrong and can do differently, this event was not unique in that there were several.

1) When the person who was going to lay our camp out could not make it, I should have figured out some kind of 'Plan B'. Not having someone from headquarters there in advance of people setting up their camps was a mistake. That led to some frustration in regards to streets. In addition, I should have done a better job (along the lines of what we did at Shiloh) where we had the civilians close (along a line at the back of the military streets, but not IN the military camp). Not doing so created some frustration. That was my fault.

2) I should have ignored the order to pull us off the wall for the Wheatfield scenario. We were promised to be a part of that, we were lied to. I blame myself for not ignoring the order. Those of you that were frustrated by that I apologize. I was so angry by this I did not bother attending the Brigade Officer's meeting later in the day. The practice we put in was completely wasted. I am sorry.

3) A bit of the same 'trust' issue in regards to the march. It was longer than what was 'advertised', and it fatigued a lot of people. I should not have taken at face value what I was told in regards to this march, again, my fault.

4) Last, bugle calls. Having a Brigade commander in our camp with his Bugler, doing calls that sometimes were not in alignment with our calls, caused a lot of confusion. At one point that created some tension with our color company and a few of our other companies. That was NO ONE'S fault but mine, I should have done a better job of clarifying times of when to form up in the street and when to come onto line.

Logistically I give the event a D- at best. Limited signage, the regular fight for water and ice, and the disgusting conditions of the porta-pottys were big negatives and an event this size should have had all that figured out. I was thrilled with our performance in drill and battle, that was probably one of the best battalions we have put together.

Thanks to all of you for attending, I hope I can march with you again soon.

*Colonel Van*