

160th/2025 Bentonville AAR

I think I can speak for everyone in the Guard battalion that it was a long drive to the Bentonville site. I know it took me and the guys with me right around 12 hours to make the trip. It was thankfully a fairly easy drive with only a couple of delays. We got registered smoothly and dropped our gear almost right on our campsite, which was a welcome amenity that we were forewarned may not be available. A couple of staff meetings later, and we all sat around campfires enjoying beautiful weather and welcome friends. The Guard battalion turned out about 24 rifles from the regular Guard infantry groups under Capt. Walker, and were also bolstered in spectacular fashion by the addition of the 29 rifles from the 1st Michigan Engineers under Capt. Dembski. We were also joined by a company armed with Henry rifles under Capt. Koster, which provided a much welcome addition to the group.

Reveille came earlier than most of us wanted, but it was a crisp morning that was not too cold for those that didn't bring great coats. After a short roll call and weapons inspection, we all ate some breakfast and started forming for a morning parade. Parade was supposed to have been overseen by Col. Zeckman, but he was called away for a meeting, so Lt Col VanMaldegan and Maj Lundberg took the duties. We did a little drill after parade and the park weapon inspection, which I was very pleased with that we had not lost our edge over the winter. After heading back to camp, we all ate some dinner and started forming for the afternoon battle. The battle commenced with the campaigners, who were portraying the 21st Michigan taking the field and starting a trench line under fire from the enemy. We had a long wait to get engaged, but once we started proceeding forward, the GAR units were instructed to dig as if their life depended on it with whatever they had available. Plates, cups, and hands were used by some, but cubic yards of dirt were flung around by the engineers and their implements. Covering all of this digging to our front was the tremendous volume of fire delivered by the company of Todd Koster's Henry rifles who were deployed as skirmishers. The lone company of Henry's cleared the field of the enemy and we finished our digging and went back under arms. When the enemy took the field again, the entire battalion opened fire delivering withering fire under repeated Confederate assaults. The battle ended with the Confederates retreating into the tree line and we headed back to camp. The engineers returned to the field with a couple extra volunteers to fortify the trenches that were hastily dug during the battle, finishing a beautiful fortification long enough to cover both the Guard and MDM battalions.

Unfortunately for everyone in attendance and the trenches prepared by our engineers, some very severe weather was predicted for the next day, and all of the activities for Sunday were cancelled. Thankfully those that planned on leaving all packed up and left in good order, and those that stayed the night packed what they could and moved cars closer. I know my car left Saturday night and drove through the night, getting home a little after 8:30 in the morning. Hope to see you all on the field at the next Guard event at Hastings in July.

As always, your obedient,

Col. Miner