

Hastings 2023 After Action Report

I have said this before, but truly mean it this time. What a weekend! This is going to be a long one because so many great things happened all weekend. The event started on Friday with everyone arriving to set up, to which we were treated to lovely breezy weather. As we watched the camp grow, there were the usual handshakes and hugs as old friends arrived. It was nice to see old friends and start to catch up over the winter's happenings. As night drew, the weather closed in on us and we were treated to one very heavy rainstorm which didn't start slowing until about 2am.

Thankfully everyone woke up Saturday morning healthy and mostly happy. As the camp slowly came to life, fires were started and coffee pots were put on. We all formed up a battalion of nearly 100 men in the morning for drill to shake off the rust and learn some new maneuvers. There were a handful of fresh fish in the group, and so we started with some Company drill. We then regrouped the battalion for a little group drill and there was some learning done all around (a large part my own), and some reminders for others. We even went so far as to dare and go off script from what I had planned and that maneuver went off mostly without a hitch thanks to the Company Commanders experience on the field. We marched off early Saturday afternoon into battle where we were portraying a battle similar to Hunterstown, in Pennsylvania. The Federal Cavalry, under the experienced leadership of Capt Kevin Yaeger, engaged the Confederate Cavalry under Capt Blake Sponsel drawing them into fire by a skirmish company led by Capt Mike Hammond. After the two cavalry units fully engaged, which involved both guns firing and swords clashing with numerous rally's and charges, the Confederate Cavalry were driven from the field to be replaced by the Confederate Infantry. As the Confederate's, led by Col Ben Cwayna, advanced onto the field, our skirmish company was forced back and we had to bring up the remainder of the wing to support with companies led by Capt Scot Spiekerman and Capt Mark Dembski. Unfortunately they were forced back into town with heavy casualties to be met by the other wing of Federals. The other wing, composed of Infantry Companies led by Lt John Vohlken, Capt Andrew McComas, and Capt Scott Lawalin, suffered from some communication misunderstandings and were outmaneuvered, forcing us to surrender the field. Saturday night brought some patrols from Cap Hammond's Company who went on search and destroy missions to remove some impediments created by the Confederate Infantry. After a nearly completely successful mission, I was approached by Cap Sponsel with news that they had captured 5 of the men that were out on patrol. A meeting with Col Cwayna was arranged and a price for the prisoners was set. After retrieving the agreed price (thanks to a donation from Cap Spiekerman), a bottle of good whiskey was surrendered to the Confederates in exchange for the prisoner's freedom. As we marched the newly freed men back to camp, we discovered that the whole of the patrol was not captured and the only man not captured was an NCO. A Board of Inquiry was convened to discover why the Corporal abandoned his men and fled, and a punishment was handed down after being found guilty of his crimes. The rest of the evening passed mostly uneventfully with many conversations being had around a fire.

Sunday morning woke us, the battalion was roused and formed up for the morning tactical. Almost the entire battalion stepped off for the morning fight and a plan was laid out as to how we would defeat the enemy. On a side note, I want to again extend my utmost appreciation to every single man that joined the group for the morning tactical. We marched into the woods to see Capt Sponsel's mounted riders on every side of ours causing more than a few pauses to reorient. We pushed forward meeting some stiff resistance at times from the Confederate Infantry, but slowly pushed them backwards. We rounded a corner of on of the trails to find a couple artillery pieces blocking the road which caused us a few casualties, but were quickly taken out of play. With the companies led by Captains McComas, Dembski, and Lawlain, and Lt Vohlken pushing into an open meadow, and the timely appearance of Captains Hammond and Spiekerman to secure our right flank, we gave the Confederates a final push across an open field securing a victory. The rest of the morning passed quickly as men regathered strength from the morning's fight. We formed for a final time in early afternoon to march off to battle, again recreating Hunterstown. The two Cavalry units engaged again to start the battle and after withdrawing, it was our turn to lure the opposing force into the village area where they were quickly crushed under the strength of both wings of the battalion. We (I think I can speak for most of us at least) all left the scenario quite tired, but very happy with what had transpired over the weekend.

This event's success would not have been possible on my end without the support of my staff, and I would be remiss not to give them that mention. Maj Ryan VanMaldegan was everywhere I wasn't all weekend and ably led the right wing of the battalion during the public demonstrations and was the command extension we needed during the morning tactical. Capt Robbie Giorlando stepped up to volunteer to start learning the position of Adjutant and was also very flexible

all weekend doing any number of things I asked of him. He was another very useful relay in the command chain during the tactical moving all over the battalion helping to relay orders. Sgt Maj Nick Leach agreed to fill the post of Sergeant Major quite last minute due to my own oversight and performed his duties without complaint and kept us all straight. Lastly to Capt Tom Emerick who filled a role as an Aide to help tutor Robbie, but also jumped in to fill every job of every other role he saw wasn't being done. He was also teaching me during our drill correcting a couple of my misunderstandings, which is always appreciated.

Before concluding, I want to make two acknowledgements. The first in appreciation to Blake Sponsel and the Cavalry riders that he brought up from Illinois for the first time to Hastings to play with us for a weekend. You guys were a formidable force to deal with and a most welcome addition to our event. I'm very happy we were able to give you guys a successful weekend and I look forward to our next time on the field. The second acknowledgement I want to make is to Mark Dembski and the 1st Michigan Engineers who also came up from Chicago and joined us for the first time in nearly 20 years. I want to say, these guys worked their tails off all weekend helping our guys in the Tiger Light Guard to firm up their fortifications (of which not much improvement was able to be made from what I'm told), helping to remove and destroy some of the obstacles placed by our opponent, erecting on Saturday and then moving on Sunday a significant length of cheval de frise on the main battlefield we used for the public demonstrations. They were another most welcome addition to the event and also had a very successful weekend with the promise to return again.

It was one of the best events I have attended locally in quite a long time and that is something I want to keep happening. I heard more than a few men also call it the best event we have done there in quite a while, which I was very happy to hear. Let's keep building this weekend's momentum and move forward at future events. We had lots of really good little things happen that were not mentioned above because I'm long winded enough as it is. If there is something you can do to add to these events, I encourage you to consider putting something together. If you have ideas that we can incorporate or suggestions for changes, please bring them up to your officers or myself and we will see how we can enhance the experience again. I hope to see many of you at Jackson! I'm going to make one more shameless plug for you to attend the national event recreating Chickamauga this September if you are available and please register now if you are going. Right now, we are going to be heavily outnumbered, and I know Scott Lawalin who is leading our battalion in my stead would appreciate the support. We have had a great turnout from the Guard the past 3 big events and we want to carry that support forward, but can't do it without you.

As always your obedient,

Col. Miner