

“Pursuit of Floyd”

Genesee Country Village, Mumford, NY

Nov 11-13 2012

I arrived at the Genesee Country Village and Museum at about 4pm on Friday. Despite my twenty years in this glorious hobby, I had never done an immersion event so my emotions prior to the event were a mix of anticipation, excitement and nervousness.

It's not that I'd not wanted to do events like this, just that the opportunity had never come my way or that I felt my impression was not good enough when presented with that opportunity.

Forming the Company

Our portrayal was that of the 7th Ohio moving through western Virginia in November of 1861.

From the Twenty-Eighth New York we had Robert Beebe and myself present to participate in the event, so we were companied with four men of the 6th Ohio, under the command of Lieut. John Buker (also of the 6th Oh). I found myself being brevetted to Sergeant.

At 8pm, with the daylight of Friday already well behind us, the Union column, in heavy marching order, moved into the woodland to locate a camp for the night. Following a march along grass and dirt tracks which wound their way through fields, woodland and along the banks of creeks, we settled down for the night. Our company was placed on rest for the next eight hours while the other two companies were posted on picket and reserve positions.

Maybe an hour later a second column arrived in the camp with reinforcements for the companies which included Robert Beebe. It was a cold night, and in this unknown location, few of our company slept well.

Saturday Morning Picket Experiences

At 4am, we were detailed to move onto picket duties, the company was ordered to gear up and our first relief moved out. I found myself posted guarding a cross roads to the east of the camp. The full moon and clear night sky provided our guard with plenty of visibility...

To be honest, there was almost too much visibility as, in the darkness and in the unknown ground, peoples eyes played tricks on them. That shadow made by a bush suddenly became a Confederate soldier; the slight movement of a branch in a small breeze, 50 yards away, was the enemy moving against your flank.

One story in the history of the Twenty-Eighth tells of the first night they spent on picket in Virginia, when a picket put 35 rounds into a tree-stump “just to be sure”... Having been through that night, I can slightly empathize with that sentinels thought process. I could have opened fire a dozen times, if not for the fact that I feared it would give our camp location away.

After an hour, my relief arrived and I returned to camp. People in our company had stories about being attacked by chipmunks with clear Confederate sympathies, deer walking to within bayonet range or encounters with rabid squirrels.

An hour and a quick cup of coffee later, I was out again. It was 6am. We had been told to expect the possibility of an early attack on camp, so, with dawn approaching, we should be extra cautious at this time. However, following an uneventful hour involving watching the morning creep upon us my relief arrived and, with the last of our company back in camp, we were rotated off picket.

Rest, Patrols and an Early Skirmish

As the morning moved on a platoon each from First and Second companies were sent out to scout the area in which we found ourselves. This left our small Company in camp on rest, a platoon from Second Company on picket and a platoon from First Company in reserve.

Our camp was located in a small pine wooded area with an impassable brush covered ridge to the south, a marsh to the north, which was also considered impassable, paths entering at east and west, which is where our pickets were deployed.

At about 9:30am, we began to hear distant firing to the west and immediately called our men to terminate their breakfast and pack their gear in readiness to move out.

Five minutes later we were ordered to move up to support the ever increasing level of firing and, deployed as skirmishers, came on line to the left of the platoon of the Second Company, which was under the command of Lieut. O'Connor.

We moved forward into an excellent defensive position along a fence line which ran along the northern rim of a large open gorge and gave us an excellent observation position. From this position Confederate skirmishers could be clearly seen positioned on the far side of the gorge and we exchanged fire at a distance of maybe 200 meters.

To the right of Lt. O'Connors platoon was Captain Lavis with a platoon of the First Company. The two platoons to our right began a wide sweep with our company anchoring the line. In order to maintain the link, our right was shifted forwards and encountered some resistance from the Confederates to our front.

After a short firefight, the Rebs had suffered some losses and, with Lt. O'Connor now moving against their flank, the Confederates withdrew.

Along much of the line, the Confederates, with their flank compromised, began to disengage and we received orders to terminate the engagement and withdraw to defensive positions. Both sides had taken casualties and two Confederate soldiers had been captured.

We held the defensive line along the northern edge of the gorge for some time without seeing any further movement or firing from the enemy and were eventually ordered to return to camp at

about 11:30am. The company was ordered to take a quick lunch as we would be moving from rest into the reserve position at noon, not that it had been much of a “rest” for us.

Into Reserve, a Patrol Cut Short and an Accidental Engagement.

At about 12:30pm, our company was ordered to make a patrol around the area to the west of the camp, where we had been engaged only a short time earlier, and we stepped off in light marching order with flankers deployed and moved past the outer picket perimeter. We saw Captain Lavis setting off on a patrol with one of his platoons at the same time.

Our company moved along the northern edge of the gorge and through the fields beyond that, where there was sign of the fight which the right of our line had experienced earlier, we then shifted north, passed a series of small buildings, moved down a hill and through a large open clover field which gave us great visibility for maybe 300 meters in each direction.

Everything was quiet, so after half an hour patrol, we turned back to the east to start the movement back to camp. However, Robert Beebe, out in front, spotted some movement between us and our destination on the far side of the field. We split into two groups to try and identify what had been seen. It didn't take long.

From the direction of our camp, we suddenly heard firing... One shot at first, followed by two more, then four, then a company... We stepped off, at the double quick, passed the pickets and moved to the sound of the guns, passed through our camp, which, somewhat disturbingly, was completely empty.

We found ourselves at the picket position where I had been posted at 4am that morning and could hear firing taking place through the trees to the east. I was ordered along the track to the north to identify a way around the Confederate rear.

50 meters along the track was a slight bend to the left. I rounded the corner and was faced with a single Confederate staring back at me at maybe 10 yards. After a tense few moments, he surrendered at the second time of asking and I moved him back along the track and handed him over to be guarded.

With our company in reserve we could hear firing through the trees, which began to slow and eventually stop. As we were receiving word that the Confederate patrol to our east had been surrounded and captured we suddenly heard firing to our rear and shifted the company, at the double quick, back along the track and past our camp.

As we approached the sound of the firing, we saw a couple of the pickets, Sgt-Major Ryan and one or two others holding off a line of maybe 20 Confederate infantry. We quickly deployed in cover to strengthen our position and began looking to guard our flanks against possible movements.

Sgt. John Goloski of the 2nd Company shifted along a deer track to the right with a handful of men from the 2nd Company while Cpl Beebe, of our company, moved left with a mixture of people from all three companies including Joe Leichty from 3rd Company.

We had a real mix of people with us at this time. Half of the 2nd Company, under the command of Lieut. O'Connor, was deployed to guard the prisoners and the camp; half of the 1st Company, under the command of Captain Lavis, was deployed to the west of the camp; elements of the 2nd Company was strung out as skirmishers to the north and half of 3rd Company, with Cpl Beebe, was moving to link between Captain Lavis and our own position. The rest was with us, it was people from all three companies with Lieut. Buker as company command and Major Bills to our rear.

For some time, our position was very much pinned down. The only way forward for us was along a narrow path directly at the enemy, while they had a slight ridge in the path providing them cover. Eventually, Sgt. Goloski and Cpl Beebe were able to gain some ground on the flanks of the Confederate lines and their main force on the road was forced to redeploy.

As they withdrew, pockets of soldiers were deployed along the way which made our movement very slow and costly.

After a number of short firefights, we drove the Confederates back and across the clover field that we had been patrolling only an hour earlier. However, the great field of vision which had been advantageous on our patrol was now acting against us as the Confederates had taken up a defensive line along the top of the hill overlooking the field, with a fence providing significant cover and were picking our flank skirmishers off.

The men were ordered to take care with their shots and try to keep the Confederates heads down. We had Private Michael Lavis, of the 1st Company, to our right who had moved out into the field to give us more room for others to fire. He was loading prone but was clearly visible to the Confederates and he was killed there.

Our movement stalled with the Confederates pinning much of our position down and our men unwilling to move from what cover they had found.

Finally, we received orders to take the hill. We were maybe 150 metres from the top of the hill and while Sgt. Goloski shifted his skirmisher further to the right of our position, we began moving from cover to cover and overlapping as we advanced.

As we cleared the first cluster of trees, we could see other Union infantrymen pinned down on the side of the gorge to our left. This was Cpl. Beebe's section with Captain Lavis to his left.

We could now clearly see the Confederate troops on the fence and we had maybe ten or so riflemen with us, five to our left with Cpl. Beebe and five to the right with Sgt. Goloski. At this time, suddenly the Confederates on our front decided to fire a full volley at us, which left them all unloaded... We all charged!

Seeing a general advance to their front, the Confederates had no choice but to withdraw and we moved up to the fence line in good order. I reached the fence and could see Sgt. Goloski moving past the small group of buildings to our right, and Captain Lavis' company, having scaled the side of the gorge, moving over the fence to the left.

As Lieut. Buker moved up we were ordered over the fence line. The Confederates had given up significant ground and we pushed forward. As we moved forward, we could see that the Confederates had disengaged and moved into an open field. We deployed several skirmishers along a stone wall while many of our other men took a well needed break.

The skirmishers were very efficient with several confirmed kills including the Confederate Field Command. Taking heavy losses, the Confederates withdrew.

At this time, the 1st Company, under the command of Captain Lavis, was redeployed as skirmishers to our front, the 2nd Company was mostly to our right and most of 3rd Company was back in reserve in our defensive position on the northern edge of the gorge.

After a short while, we were ordered back to camp and we filled the vacant picket positions to secure the camp perimeter until the rest of the battalion returned.

Time to Move

In the previous battle, our camp had been compromised and there was the belief that our picket countersign had been revealed to the Confederates during the battle by elements trying to identify themselves to one another.

The firing which had initiated the battle had come from the picket position to the east of the camp which I had been posted in during the night. That position was maybe only 25 yards away from the camp itself.

With that, it was decided that we needed to completely redeploy. Our cavalry identified that the Confederates had moved into the village and had seen that they had positioned a sentinel on a ridge from where they could clearly see into our camp. Something would have to be done to distract the pickets.

Shortly after 3pm, Second Company formed up in heavy marching order and moved to the new camp ahead of the rest of the battalion.

At 4pm, our Company rotated back into picket. In a day of offensive movements by the Confederates, we would have the last picket detail at the old camp and the first detail at the new camp.

I found myself posted to the north of the camp, on the track along which we had fought just a few hours earlier. From this position, I could see the edge of the clover field and part of the hill top fence which we had charged during the last engagement.

Within 35 minutes a runner arrived calling in the pickets. We arrived back in camp to find people ready to march off. Reports had reached us from 2nd Company that the picket who had been observing our camp earlier was no longer present so we moved out immediately.

As we left the camp, we could hear firing from the direction of the village to the south. Second Company, in order to mask our movements, had deployed as skirmishers and was engaged by the Confederates holding the village itself.

We left the sounds of battle behind us and marched north into a wooded glade with a creek running along the northern edge dense woodland to the south and a single track leading in from the east and west.

Grand Central Station

As the last of the daylight left us, Third Company was deployed back onto picket at the new camp. I found myself posted at a major intersection and, unlike my previous picket posts, had a large amount of traffic inbound.

Second Companies movements against the village had successfully masked our movements away from the camp, but not without losses. Three men were killed and several captured by the Confederates.

These men had been checked for information and paroled in small groups. Other men from the battalion had been left behind to keep an eye on the camp until everyone was back.

Two men walked up to me in uniforms, and upon being challenged, I recognized one as Alex Johnson, of 2nd Company. He'd forgotten the new countersign, but the other gentleman with him remembered it.

The next straggler from 2nd Company, a Corporal, wasn't as lucky and had no idea what the new countersign was. I had to escort him back towards the camp and call for the Corporal of the Guard to escort him back to camp.

The cavalry arrived next to report to the new camp and receive orders. One of the horses was less than certain about the silhouette carrying the bayoneted rifle who challenged them.

The biggest shock I got was from one of the event judges. He wasn't wearing brogans or horse shoes, so, in the twilight and with his camouflaged uniform, he was able to get right up to me before I heard him.

At 8pm, we were rotated off picket detail and were ordered to remain at rest through to 4am.

Into the Village

The Union had spent much of Saturday on the defensive. It had been left to the Confederates to make the moves against our position. It was a strategy which nearly paid off during the second engagement and forced us to make some changes.

However, that was due to change. It was decided that we would take the fight to the enemy and would launch an attack on the village to the south at dawn on Sunday, then move against the Confederate camp.

At 4am, we found ourselves back on picket, for the final time. At 5am, I was deployed to the same location I had been in the evening before and remained there until the pickets were called in at 5:45am.

By 6am, in heavy marching order, we stepped off, on the attack... A long winding track brought us around the east side of the southern sympathizing village. We initially moved to the edge of the village and positioned our lines behind a small white farm house with a black door, surrounded with fields. I turned and saw something move in the window. Private Joe Leichty moved up to the door, he opened it and was faced to face with a man and his wife.

We requested permission to search the building, moved in, searched the building and left the family in peace.

Our company began to move through the streets of the village towards the main village square. We encountered a number of civilians, who were not exactly very comfortable talking to us, but were not hostile.

With the village secured, 3rd Company took up a defensive position along a stone wall to the west of the village. At this time, we had 2nd Company in skirmish order to our left and 1st Company moving into line on our right.

The Union Attacks

We held this position for about 20 minutes and received word that the cavalry had identified approximately where the Confederate camp was located.

The battalion was formed in column and we moved towards their position. It was a march which took us through fields, woodland and along a railroad cut. I'll admit I was nervous, I'd survived this long and had no intention of getting killed now. We were moving through enemy territory which they had no doubt scouted as well as we had scouted the ground near our camp.

As we neared the area where the Confederate camp was believed to be located, our column split into two forces. The cavalry and 1st Company moved left, while 2nd and 3rd Companies moved to the right.

Guided by Corporal Eney, of 2nd Company, we moved through an area of coppiced trees which opened up into an area of large oak trees. Through the trees at maybe a distance of 400 meters, we could see smoke rising from a small raised area of ground. As we moved to within 300

meters, we could see men moving and we deployed to the left of the track as skirmishers. Second Company deployed to our right and both companies began to move forwards.

As we came under fire, we could see the 1st Company moving in line with us to the far left.

As we got within 150 meters of the enemy position, we went to ground and slowly began shifting forwards from cover to cover. We could also see 2nd Company beginning to wrap around the far flank of the Confederate breastworks. As they did so, the Confederates began to gradually withdraw from their initial position, but they merely withdrew into a stronger position and managed to slow our advance.

I was positioned on the right of the 3rd Company skirmish line and I found a large tree to take cover behind. This was a position that I held for several minutes while I exchanged shots with a Confederate Sergeant to my front. I had Sgt. Major Ryan to my left taking cover behind the same tree that I was using.

About 5 meters in front of me was a hollow in the ground with a couple of logs in front which, from my position, gave some good cover. As I moved forward into this position, I realized it was not as deep as I had hoped for, so rolled backwards to make better use of the cover and fired from a reclined position for some time.

We were now in their camp. We were currently moving past one of their company campfires which was still burning.

From here, I could see that, behind the line of Confederates to our front, was more Confederates firing away from us. The cavalry and 1st Company had swept around the flank of the enemy and, with 2nd Company still moving forward on our right, we had the enemy almost completely surrounded.

We were pushing them back, but it had been hard fought to get to this point.

“Sergeant Major’s down” came the call as Corporal Eney came up level with my position before he crawled forward to take cover behind a large fallen tree about 10 meters in front of our line. He was joined there by Cpl Melvin Glover from the 3rd Company.

I looked down to the left of our company line and could see that Cpl Beebe had been shot and that Lieut. Buker was grabbing caps and cartridges out of Cpl Beebe’s accoutrements to fire his rifle. Things seemed to be getting desperate on both sides.

As I began to crawl forward to join Corporals Eney and Glover, I noticed that the camp fire we had overrun had set fire to some of the dry leaves which were a thick blanket covering the ground over which we were fighting and it was spreading rapidly.

I immediately jumping up from my cover and stamped out the fire.

bang

bang

I was dead.