

A Wildwood AAR

After an uneventful road trip, Kay and I arrived at the event site about 4:30 PM Friday. Registration was conveniently located and we quickly signed our waivers and followed the "gator" to the civilian camp near the Manor house. Access to this area was tight, but we soon had her wall tent up and settled in. Mr Minton was kind enough to arrange a "gator" ride for me to the US military camp, where I erected my A tent and we discussed the lay of the land and tactical plans for the morning. After taking the vehicle to the parking area and going to town for dinner, I put my "working clothes" on and hiked back to the military camp. I was gratified to see that I was no longer "an army of one", having been joined by the 21st, 57th and elements of the 30th OVI. After locating the other Union units' camps and briefing the key players about plans for the morning, I turned in for a calm but rather chilly night's sleep.

Reveille sounded promptly at 7 Saturday morning, and about 7:15 a civilian entered our camp claiming to know the location of a large quantity of spilled provisions which were free for the taking. A detail commanded by Lt Tong of the 57th OVI was quickly assembled to retrieve whatever we could use. Something shady was noted about the "guide's" behavior, so a couple of armed men went along. I "found" some hot coffee in the 41st OVI's camp, then sat down to munch on my dry rations, keeping an open ear in case of developments. Sure enough, after a few minutes a single shot rang out, followed by a spatter of musketry indicating the foragers were in serious trouble. I quickly put Capt Heist of the 30th in charge of all the men remaining in camp, with orders to take arms and relieve the foragers as quickly as possible. Running the short distance to the 41st's camp, I gave similar orders to Capt Rechnitzer, who was already reacting as the enemy was pressing close. Rechnitzer held the intersection by his camp until Heist came up, and a quick push forward resulted in the recovery of all the foragers plus the provisions they had gathered. We also recovered the civilian guide, who loudly protested his innocence in spite of manifest evidence of his duplicity. Accordingly I directed a corporal of the 41st to load one round and accompany the guide and me for a short walk, from which only the corporal and I returned.

The troops quickly made short work of the rations and we assembled both Blue and Gray for a combined battalion drill at 9 AM. The Federal troops had a rather intricate maneuver to perform for the first battle scenario (deploying from column into line, left in front) and practice was warranted. It was well that we did so as the first attempt was an utter failure, but after some patient explanation and taking the maneuver through step by step it got fairly smooth. We also reviewed the textbook method of dressing the battalion on the center, using general and company guides; and the posts of the various key players when advancing in line of battle and firing. Company commanders were then given charge of their troops for drill at discretion until the 11 AM skirmish scenario.

Two skirmishes were scheduled each day, at 11 AM and 2 PM. These were held on the same field but the initial positions and force allocations were varied. The first scenario was meant to be an unsuccessful Union attack, but after I "took a hit" the senior US captain became overaggressive and attempted to press the enemy off the field. Fortunately I was able to get the Adjutant's attention and send the word to withdraw according to plan. The Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning scenarios flowed better.

After the second skirmish, Saturday's activities continued with a pie and dessert auction to benefit battlefield preservation, which raised over \$600. A dress parade was planned for 4:30, but was postponed until Sunday morning to allow time for dinner and setup for the lantern tours. The Park provided dinner, and shuttle service to and from camp which was much appreciated. I took advantage of the 64th OVI's field laundress service and dropped off a shirt and drawers.

Lantern tours for spectators at the Manor house began at 7:30. Adjutant Rushe, Lt Tong and I portrayed Union officers conferring in the drawing room after a battle. We were joined by my wife Kay and Miss Laura Nutt, who portrayed hostile residents of the home and hissed at us over their

embroidery work. A total of five groups visited and we had the action flowing smoothly by the second one. The 64th OVI and their laundresses had a second station set up outdoors, which I believe featured a "mortally wounded" Rebel prisoner.

After conferring with Mr Minton, we decided to forgo any early morning action on Sunday and let everyone have a quiet breakfast. The second night was not quite as chilly, and reveille sounded again at 7 AM. After breakfast a discussion on battle scenario realism was led by Nate Hoam of the 64th OVI. Some interesting ideas were brought forward and I hope more discussion on this topic will follow during the year.

At the Chaplain's request I gave a reading at the church service, then met with Minton again to finalize arrangements for the dress parade and 11 AM skirmish. Both armies fell in for the parade, and a remembrance service was held for Cpl Rick Shoemaker of the 14th OVI who passed away over the winter. I also had the privilege of presenting Sgt Major Underwood of the 64th OVI with his chevrons.

The two armies then executed an "outward face" and marched to their initial skirmish positions. Fortunately this was the best skirmish of the weekend as it also turned out to be the last. A steady light rain began to fall, which we initially were told would be followed by clearing weather. That turned out not to be the case and the Park made the sensible decision to shut things down before the ground became too soggy. I was not able to locate a free "gator" so had to "hump" my wet A tent the several hundred yards from military to civilian camp, discovering once again how easy it is for canvas to gain weight in the Army. Breaking camp proceeded with normal confusion and Kay and I were on the road home by 3:30 PM.

In summary, this is one of the best small events I have attended. The site is nearly perfect, with varied terrain, plentiful shade and easy access to hard surface roads for convenient vehicle access. It is easily adaptable for anything from a garrison-style camp of instruction to a "battle" event to a weekend "mini-campaign". The Park staff were polite and went out of their way to take care of our needs and requests. The schedule kept everyone occupied without setting a killing pace, and Bob Minton and the members of the 14th exercised considerable ingenuity in creating varied scenarios. I hope the Park was as pleased as we were and the event will continue in future years.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Ruley
Lt Col, commanding Federal forces, Wildwood.