

Maryland, My Maryland – September 8-9, 2012

About noon on Friday September 7, Tim Bills and I began the trip to the 150th Anniversary event of the battles of South Mountain and Antietam. Our journey would take us from Rochester, NY 2012 to Boonesboro, MD 1862. We were to meet several other members of the 140th NY including Mike O'Connor, Tom Eneedy, Zac, Silas and Chris Holtz, Tom Gurnett, Antone and Brian Olney, Owen Begner, Al and Ian Walker, and Scott George. Our company was rounded out by guests from the 148th NY including James and John Goloski, Ray Derby, Bob Jayne, Mike Lonsbery, Eric Sauer and a final guest – Mike Stanton. With Tim serving as Lt. Col. of our battalion (Army of the Ohio), Dave George served as company commander at the rank of Lt., Mike O'Connor served as 1st Sgt, John Goloski as 2nd Sgt, Zac Holtz and Tom Eneedy as Cpls. We were assigned the 6th Company of the battalion which put us in the left wing under Major Scott Sharp. Arriving on site at about 7pm, Tim and I made our way to the registration tent and while concluding our business there, were met by Al and Ian Walker. Meanwhile, Scott George called to say he would be arriving within minutes so we rested there for a while after our long journey in. Scott arrived and we got him situated with the event registrars and we were off to find our camp. This business would prove to test our composure as we navigated our way through a sea of canvas, men and, narrow roads. After some time we found the federal camp and were pointed toward the camp of the Army of the Ohio battalion. Sgt. O'Connor, Cpl.'s Holtz and Eneedy and Pvt. Roundball (Gurnett) had arrived and already established camp on a knob in the woods. At first glance the spot was close quarters and secluded. We spread out best we could and made ourselves comfortable under the trees with a fire already burning and the promise of a good night. Pvt. George and the Lt. opted to put up the dog tent given the chance we may experience less than favorable conditions for just throwing down. This we accomplished with the confidence of veterans but admittedly short of the veteran impression expressed by our early arrivals who had gum blankets on the ground and no shelter save the trees overhead. Lt. Col. Bills threw down on the open side of the knob facing the road with the battalion staff including Col. Bob Minton, Major Sharp, Lt. John Buker, and Sgt Major Kyle Yoho. The company fly was erected for the comfort of the staff and the night was on.

Thick darkness enveloped the camp such that those arriving later found it difficult to locate us, many opting to wait until dawn to enter the vast tent community in search of their home for the weekend. A comfortable night ensued and everyone turned in at a relatively early hour for an event of this type. The quiet of the evening broken by familiar greetings with those determined enough to find camp after dark. That small knob in the woods became a lively and homey site for this company of New Yorkers. After the usual handful of hours sleep on Friday night, the men awoke to the drone of the Bugle. Under orders from battalion headquarters, the men fell in for roll call fully accoutered and bearing rifles for inspection. The roll taken, weapons inspected and the schedule announced, the men quickly set about to preparing their rations for the long day that awaited them. Sgt. O'Connor quickly filled out the morning report and weapons report for the Adjutant (Lt. Buker) and this Lt. signed the documents ensuring their accuracy. Our battalion would number about 200 men this day and, on the drill field later that morning, was a sight to behold. With flags flying overhead and the sunlight gleaming off the bright musket barrels, our column slowly and methodically marched to the field for dress parade and drill.

Lt. John Buker announced his retirement from his duties as Adjutant in an emotional farewell at Dress Parade. Three cheers were given him for his faithful and excellent service to the battalion. The men were given to the company commanders for a brief company drill followed by battalion drill where we practiced deployments for the coming action. Soon we marched back to camp and made preparations for the day. For some, that required a trip into "town" to see the local merchants on sutler row. The Lt. Col. was pleased to find a new pair of brogans that fit just right. Pvt. George requisitioned a double bag knapsack, the better to carry his belongings with. Other men found items to satisfy their requirements as well. Before long we were all back in camp and ready for action. The orders came and soon we had fallen in and formed the battalion on the road. Light marching order was all that was required of us, our packs and other sundry items were left behind. Once the brigades were sorted out and placed in order for battle, we stood behind the cover of trees along the road from Keedysville and waited... Company officers were ordered to the head of the column for a briefing on our deployments. The terrain was rough with rock outcroppings and heavy brush full of thorns and briars. Our movement sure to be slowed by these variables but our determination to meet the rebels could not be distracted by such trifling obstacles.

Back on the road, the men were beginning to feel anxious with atmospheric conditions rapidly declining. The wind had picked up now and the gusts moved through the trees like the waters of a river through the shallows. The sky darkened and orders were given to make our way back to camp. No sooner had the order been given and the skies opened pouring down on us a deluge of water. All formality now abandoned, the men made haste in their pursuit of cover from the storm. Some took shelter in nearby outhouses, as the rain came down and the thunder sounded around us. This Lt. was accompanied by Pvt. Stanton and sought shelter under the canvas of mature trees just off the road. Figuring that it would prove futile to run through mud slicked roads only to achieve a miserable end back on the knob, these two soldiers traveled only a few steps. The shelter of the trees retarded the inevitable soaking we would otherwise have received had we followed the mad rush of troops. Not thoroughly saturated, we made our way back to the knob as the rain let up and the storm moved on. Roads now thick with mud would soon prove nearly impassable once the troops were reorganized and marched on.

Within the hour the battle was on in earnest. Our route of march the same as before and our deployment was made on the right, by file into line and the entire battalion was arrayed in battle line. The musket fire delivered by the rebels had less effect than the rain and casualties were comparatively light. The initial engagement was fought with the battalion intact with parade ground discipline and steady volley fire by company and rank. Only after more rebel infantry arrived did the scene become less manageable. While more of our own infantry arrived – support of a 2nd Brigade – the Confederates seemed to pour an endless supply of troops into the fray. The fighting now intense and every man loading and firing rapidly, our position was soon made untenable by fire from our front and right. The battalion began falling back, picking up the wounded as we traversed the field. Chris Holtz was gathered after sustaining a slight wound and assisted to safety in the rear.

The 5th and 6th Companies of the battalion found themselves separated from our organization and assisted by Major Sharp we made our way around the rear and linked up with 2 companies from Wisconsin and determined to give the rebels a thrashing on the left flank. Across a field and through thick brush we fell on the left flank of the Confederates on the battlefield and poured a devastating fire into them while they were yet unaware of our presence. The actions of these few companies slowed the Rebels determination to push head on into the Federal forces in the open field. By forcing their hand on the left, precious time was purchased for a strong headlong push by our brigades through the gap. The game was up and Johnny was forced to retire from his position. In this action no casualties were reported from the ranks of 6th Company. Pleased with their work, the men of this amalgamated battalion secured their gains and made their way back to the main body. It took some time to get reorganized but soon we were back on the march in pursuit of our now disorganized opponent...

Once again the rain made an appearance and, though not as vigorous as before, became more persistent thus turning already mired roads into impassable sloughs. Our pursuit was delayed while the rain settled in so the men took to cover under canvas and whiled away the afternoon by catching up on sleep, cleaning rifles and, working to keep equipment dry. Col. Minton was down with an upset stomach but soldiered through his discomfort like a grizzled veteran. This Lt. took the opportunity to retreat to thoughts of home and spent the time penning letters to family. Just days away is the anniversary of his marriage, and his wife would surely find comfort in word of her husband's well being. He wrote her "...I realize that the mark of 12 years since our marriage is now only days away and I write in hopes that this word reaches you on or about that most significant of days for us...I pray all is well with you and the children. You have the warmth and security of the home we built and in this I am envious...I pray always for you..." To his son he would write, "...How I wish you could be with me here, but your station is the greater to be desired..." and to his young daughter, "How I miss your bright and cheerful countenance, particularly on this, a most dreary day when all is thick mud, gray skies and groaning men..."

The day dragged on and just before sunset the rain ceased. A bright sun shone through the clouds and a most welcome and pleasant evening was upon us. Our spirits lifted by the bright evening but still dampened by wet clothes and blankets. Some of the men succeeded with getting the fire going and coffee was on as well as contributions from several men made a hot stew for supper. Pvt. George cooked some more bacon. Pvt. Jayne put together a dish consisting of sausage, sauerkraut, and green apples. Some ears of corn were soaked and then laid by the fire to roast. A few of the men broke into song. Sgt O'Connor, Cpl Eneedy, Pvt. Roundball – also known as the "Broken Brogans" - composers of fine tunes much enjoyed by the battalion staff, worked their magic once more and the honoree this time is Sgt Bernie Biederman. The name "Broken Brogans" was coined on the "Along the Potomac" campaign – the battles of Ball's Bluff and Leesburg. Cpl. Eneedy had a pair of broken brogans and they the subject of much jovial conversation on that campaign. The moniker seemed fitting and thus served to identify this mess of creative parads. There the celebrated man of the hour was Sgt. Mjr. Kyle Yoho who wore a pretty frock coat... Sgt. Biederman was sure to feel honored...

Familiar voices echoed from the road and the Lt. strode down to greet old friends from another company. Sgt. Brian Porter and Pvt. Joshua Mann were conversing. The Lt. inquired of Sgt. Porter how his young son was faring – he being born just before the campaign in Scio back in April. Sgt. Porter smiled and told of his progress and development. He confessed that he feared that his son wouldn't recognize him when he finally got home. He had been far from home for a time now and worried that things wouldn't be the same. The Lt. assured him that the boy would know his father when he arrived home. God would see to that.

After dark, orders were given to fall in. The corn that had been roasting was left there, consumed not by men but by fire (a foreboding of what was to come)... Two companies were to march toward Sharpsburg and support the outpost established there. The moon had not made its appearance yet and by 10 o'clock, the night was very dark. Led by our beloved Lt. Col. we tramped through the muddied roads and marched at the route step. Making several stops along the way to fill canteens and close up the ranks. The men talked quietly about the days' events and opined on what may lay ahead for this band of brothers. The Lt. traveled up and down the ranks encouraging and accounting for each man on the long march of so dark a night. Sporadic musket fire broke the quiet of the night and alerted us that we were nearing our destination. Flashes from the muzzles of barking muskets signaled just how close the opposing lines are in relation to each other. Soon we were upon the outposts at the edge of a cornfield along the turnpike, bordered on each side by a post and rail fence, to Hagerstown. Arrangements were quickly made for our nights' stay. We progressed on through a tree line and up a slight rise where the path is concealed by dense trees. No fires were permitted (for we were in the presence of our opponent) the men threw down along the road. A few candles flickered offering a hint of warmth and dryness as the men were still damp from the rain and now lathered in sweat from the march. The groans remained hushed and soon all was quiet save the sound of exhausted men in deep slumber... The Lt. remained before his candle for a spell logging his thoughts in a leather bound journal. Only a handful of hours later while still dark, the men were roused one by one and quietly the roll was taken and we marched a short distance to where we would rendezvous with our Battalion. We stood quietly along the road and the quiet of night was only slightly disturbed by the tramp of marching feet and the clink of canteens and tin cups strapped to haversacks. The moon now high overhead provided enough light for perspective and a dark shadow approached and soon a river of men marched in good order up the road and along our position. The sight was something to behold as nearly 2,000 men made their way into position for an attack to be made at dawn. Cannon were rolled forward yet all remained quiet along the front. The battalion waited along a tree line – every man loaded down with blanket rolls and knapsacks. A few fated souls, determined not to be unnecessarily encumbered, dropped packs here and all looked anxiously to the moments ahead.

As the first rays of sunlight penetrated the early morning, skirmishers were sent forward to press through the corn and locate our adversary. He was already in the corn and soon there erupted a spirited skirmish. The men from Pennsylvania who had cautiously disappeared into the cornfield soon came streaming back, the result of a vigorous push by the rebels. Once the skirmishers appeared out of the corn, the cannons opened their thunderous mouths, sending shot into the corn and shell over it. A thick blanket of smoke lay across the field, not to be lifted for hours and only to become thicker as the fight would exceed all expectations of a "feverish pitch." Soon we were ordered into the corn. Over a rail fence and through the wet field we advanced. The tall stalks of corn slapped at head and body as the men made their way while the Major hollered after to keep dressed on the colors. The colors were nearly absent our sight as we were the left-most company and separated by men and stalks of corn. The rebels certain to be near, we halted and poured several volleys to our front before advancing again. Upon our advance, the rebels who were in our front gave as good as they had received and the fight was on. Determined men on both sides, loading and firing and firing and loading, visibility becoming more difficult with the smoke, the ability to discern orders and communicate with one another indistinguishable from the incessant rattle of musketry, the roar of cannon and the cries of men. Casualties becoming heavy, the rebels pushed forward, forcing our retreat and requiring us to leave several of our ranks behind. The fighting only grew in intensity as we made our way back from whence we came and as we passed our comrades going in, many an encouraging word was exchanged. From those going into the fray, "good work boys." And from those coming out, "give 'em hell" ...

As we reformed in the rear and rested from our work, the din of battle rose to a deafening roar and what had been visible even in the darkness was indistinguishable now in the sunlit hours of the morning as thick smoke enveloped the whole scene. Sunlight tried in vain to penetrate the heavy smoke but the haze made it to appear as red as the blood now being spilled in that corn field.

After our refitting, the battalion was made to extend to the right giving way to a battalion of Pennsylvania troops up on our left. 6th Company was instructed to anchor on the Pennsylvanians as we marched through the corn. For our next assault the left wing would be in the corn and the right would march straight up the turnpike. "Attention Battalion! Forward, MARCH!" The command given and the troops of the Army of the Ohio Battalion stepped off and faded into the smoke and corn. Sgt. Goloski and Cpl. Eneedy worked to keep our ranks aligned with Pennsylvania. Of our New Yorkers only Lt. Col. Bills would take in the sights from along the road later commenting that the carnage there was remarkable with rebel corpses strung across fence rails reminiscent of wartime photographic artwork. For the rest of us, it was corn and more corn, though well trampled now and, the scene no less horrific here than along the road. Men lay every which way, contorted in every conceivable position, torn clothing, shouts and groans of the wounded and dying, men desperately clinging to us as we marched over and passed them. No stopping to assist the poor souls as hot work lay ahead for us and it must be done. One could hardly take a step in that field without but stepping on a fallen comrade though he wore blue or gray. We pressed to the forward most position and continued the business where it had been abandoned by others. The fighting intense, the smoke ever thicker, the thunder of the guns, both musket and cannon, never louder, men falling all around us and the caldron of battle reached the boiling point. The men pressed forward with shouts and curses, with guns blazing, and determination to finish the work. A strange fear and wild excitement gripped the men in the ranks. Exiting the other side of the corn field, now a heavy battle line was arrayed to our front. We halted and sent a hail of lead into their ranks. A good number of them fell and our men wasted no time reloading their muskets. The order to advance was given again and the Lt. took his place in front of the line. A few steps and "HALT!" sounded... Col. Minton having chosen this place to make our next stand. The rebels gathered themselves and leveled their muskets....

The sound of battle was all the Lt. could discern. He lay face down in the muddied field between the angry battle lines of blue and gray until the blue stream sweeps over him pushing ever onward. He is joined by comrades lying all around him. The sounds of battle slowly fade as the deafening silence of shock sets in. Even the shrieks of the "wounded" lying only rods from him, he cannot hear. Finally, off in the distance somewhere, a bugle calls...well done.

The aftermath of the raging fury of the morning was a sight to behold. As the Lt. Col. had reflected on the sights in the Hagerstown Turnpike, the remainder of the field was littered with debris, broken fence rails and posts, bodies and a haze of smoke that would take time to lift. The sights moved many a man to tears, this Lt. not exempted. The calls began going out to retrieve those missing from the ranks and as soon as all were accounted for, Lt. Buker requested morning reports to ensure that every man was accounted for. Once reassembled, the battalion formed at the edge of the cornfield one last time to have its image struck. It was here that the lines had been blurred for a time between a re-creation of events from long ago and our own very real experiences. And the corn there had been consumed, not by men but by an angry fire...



With the photograph captured, the Col. (unable to control his appetite for drill) ordered, "Change front forward on 6th Company." At which point our company wheeled to the left and the remaining companies aligned themselves to our right on the new line. "Stack Arms"... "Rest"... which the men were all too glad to obey. Several hours would pass before we would answer the call of the bugle. The day was bright and the temperatures comfortably warm. Clothing began to dry and many of the men took to the ground and nodded off to sleep. The hours passed and soon men began to rise seeking to satisfy the abdominal groans of hunger with anything that remained in their haversacks: a piece of hardtack, ...a carrot... Mjr. Sharp offered a handful of licorice which was enjoyed by a few. Pvt. George secured a handful of donuts and shared his bounty with the Lt. and Lt. Colonel. Sgt. Biederman passed by and the mess known as the "Broken Brogans" bust into song before an audience of the battalion staff. Something about the Sgt. and a bonnet... A hearty laugh was had by all and Sgt. Biederman remarked that his turn was up and was glad that it was so.

Soon the bugle sounded and battalions began forming once again. As we had been heavily engaged in the previous fight, we were given a bit more time to rest. The fight commenced in an adjacent field and from the first shots, the firing was relentless. After a time several of our boys crossed the field to the tree line to get a view of the action. The field was teeming with combatants. Smoke encircled a small clump of woods and one could claim that the brush was on fire. We took it all in from the sidelines and the action was halted for EMS to respond to a modern emergency. Fighting resumed and before long we were formed and the battalion divided by wing approached the battlefield from opposite angles. The wings came together on the opposite side of the tree line where we stood in reserve behind the battling lines of at least 2 battalions to our front. A small window opened between the lines affording our men the opportunity to fire a few volleys. The men to our front were giving ground and soon were in full retreat through our lines. The Confederates to our front came at us and several volleys were exchanged. Many within our ranks fell as a result. A report given by Pvt. Mann prior to our entering the fight told us that the 30th Ohio had suffered significant casualties, particularly among the officers. The Lt. followed the script and from one of the first volleys had retired to the ground and the company was left to the charge of Sgt. O'Connor. Our participation in this fight was brief, the men having expended nearly all of their ammunition in the previous actions.

After some time, the fighting concluded and the battalion retreated back to the field in which it formed. The Col. offered his congratulations and thanks to the men on a fine weekend and a memorable experience. Company officers were given charge of their companies for dismissal and this Lt. greeted each man with a handshake and a word of thanks. The boys of 6th Company, 1st Battalion, 2nd Brigade, are among the finest troops I have ever known. Their conduct on the field of battle was to be admired. It's composition of several father-son groups helped to mark the reality of those we represented, knowing full well that often during the Civil War, fathers and sons, and brothers, who went in together often did not return together. Fortunately for these 21st century civilians become 19th century soldiers, we can be assured of a safe return barring any unexpected misfortune. The company was dismissed and the men exchanged greetings and farewells. Col. Minton, Lt. Col. Bills, Pvt. Mann and I made our way across the fields and down the road back toward the knob where we would retrieve the company fly. Pvt. George would meet us there to pick up his canvas as well. An hour or so later, Tim and I were on the road home. We talked about the sights and sounds, the good and the bad, but agreed that the weekend was well worth our time. We realize that in all probability there will never be another event like it. Our travels would bring us back from Boonsboro, MD 1862 to Rochester, NY 2012. If you ever wondered about time travel, we did it. And I would do it all again if given the chance....

Humbly Submitted,
Lt. D. George 140th NY
Commanding 6th Company
Army of the Ohio