

The Picket Post

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After Action Report

2nd Regiment, West Virginia Cavalry

by **Duncan Campbell**

Our Round Table Treasurer and After Action author Sandy von Thelen being still employed full time, called to ask me to take on this month's After Action Report. I have chosen to present what I believe to be some interesting aspects of the Civil War I discovered while researching material for a book I am writing about my Civil War Ancestor, Captain Ashbel Fairchild Duncan of Company E, 14th Pennsylvania Volunteer Cavalry.

The 2nd West Virginia Volunteer Cavalry Regiment served in the Union Army during the American Civil War. It was organized in Parkersburg, Virginia (now West Virginia) during September 1861. Most of the original members of this regiment were from southeastern Ohio, and planners thought that this regiment would become the 4th Ohio Cavalry. Their application was rejected by the governor of Ohio, so the unit became the 2nd Regiment of Loyal Virginia Volunteer Cavalry. The "Loyal Virginia" part of the name was replaced with "West Virginia" after the state of West Virginia was created in June 1863. Today, the National Park Service lists them as the 2nd Regiment, West Virginia Cavalry under a heading of Union West Virginia Volunteers.

Recruiting for the new cavalry regiment began in September 1861 after an appeal by President Abraham Lincoln earlier in July. The rebellion in the southern states, which began earlier in the year, had lasted longer than

expected—and many of the war's original recruits had been asked to commit to only three months of service.

Most of the recruits for this new cavalry regiment were from southeastern Ohio, including the counties of Lawrence, Meigs, and Washington—all counties located along the Ohio River border with Virginia. The nearby counties of Jackson, Vinton, and Morgan were also major sources for recruits. Additional recruits were from Putnam and Monroe counties. Company I was organized in Mason City, (West) Virginia, which is also located along the Ohio River. Volunteers for the new cavalry regiment committed to serve for 3 years. One company of recruits already had military experience. Company H consisted mostly of men who had completed their 3-month commitment at the beginning of the war as part of 18th Ohio Infantry.

The organizers had originally planned for the regiment to be the 4th Ohio Cavalry. However, Ohio's governor William Dennison refused to accept the unit's application, stating that he had instructions to recruit no more cavalry. After being rejected by Ohio, the organizers sought acceptance from an alternative government for the state of Virginia that was composed of western Virginia counties that refused to accept Virginia's succession from the United States. This restored government was located in Wheeling,

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THE WRIGHT STUFF

April 15, 2019

The Battle of Brandy Station

June 9, 1863

North America's Largest Cavalry Battle



Eric J. Wittenberg is an American Civil War historian, author, lecturer, tour guide and battlefield preservationist. He is a practicing attorney in downtown Columbus, Ohio. His published works have focused especially on the Civil War cavalryman and the cavalry battles of the Civil War, with emphasis on the Army of the Potomac's Cavalry Corps. His first book, *Gettysburg's Forgotten Cavalry Actions*, was chosen as the best new work addressing the Battle of Gettysburg in 1998, winning the Robert E. Lee Civil War Roundtable of Central New Jersey's Bachelor-Coddington Award. The second edition of this book, published in 2011, won the U. S. Army Historical Foundation's Distinguished Writing Award for that year's best reprint. In 2015, his book *The Devil's to Pay: John Buford at Gettysburg* won the Gettysburg Civil War Roundtable's 2015 Book Award. He was a member of the Governor of Ohio's Advisory Commission on the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War and has been active with several Civil War battlefield preservation organizations. He and his wife Susan Skilken Wittenberg reside on the east side of Columbus, Ohio.



and already had a provisional governor. The provisional governor, Francis Harrison Pierpont, accepted the Regiment's application with approval from the United States Secretary of War. The ten original companies of the unit reported at Parkersburg, Virginia (now West Virginia) in mid-September, 1861. The regiment was originally named 2nd Regiment of Loyal Virginia Volunteer Cavalry. Its first commander was Colonel William M. Bolles, the deputy commander was Lieutenant Colonel John C. Paxton. John J. Hoffman was one of the regiment's two Majors. Among the other original officers, William H. Powell was Captain of B Company, and David Dove was Captain of H Company.

The regiment was armed by December 15, 1861. Most of the regiment was equipped with horse pistols, a poor weaponry choice for a cavalry unit. Horse pistols were 58-caliber hand guns that fired a single shot. They were typically carried in pairs—one in each holster on the sides of the horse. They had a long barrel for a hand gun—nearly 12 inches (30.5 cm) long. Horse pistols were accurate up to about 25 yards (22.9 m). A portion of the regiment received shortened muzzle-loading Enfield rifles. This British import fired a .577-caliber projectile, and was popular with both sides at the beginning of the war. Like the horse pistol, it needed to be reloaded after firing a single shot. Both weapons were difficult for a rider to reload while mounted—and had significant recoil. The men were also issued sabers, which were good quality, but not always useful in the mountainous terrain of western Virginia.

After receiving their weapons, the regiment was ordered to Guyandotte in (West) Virginia's Cabell County. This small Ohio River community is located close to Virginia's border with Ohio and Kentucky, and is now part of Huntington, West Virginia (which did not exist at the time). At Guyandotte, the regiment received its horses and conducted more drills.

One of the Regiment's significant actions was the Wytheville Raid, July 13, 1863.

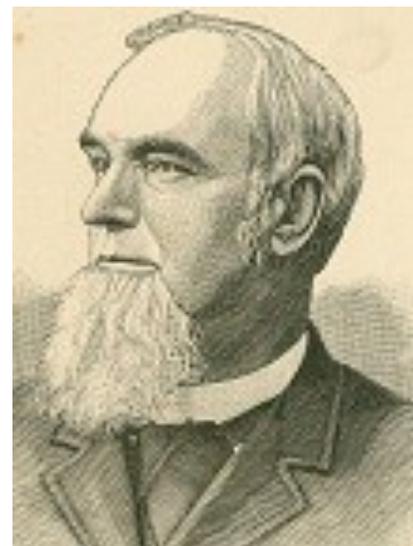
The Wytheville raid was an expedition from the Union Camp in Kanawha Valley to Wytheville, Virginia. The

raid was first organized on July 13, 1863. As it was led by Colonel John Toland, it is also known as Toland's Raid. Wytheville had a strategic significance because of a nearby lead mine. The lead mine was the source for much of the lead used by the Confederacy to produce bullets for its army. A salt mine, located west of Wytheville, was also important to the Confederacy. Another target was the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad, which served both mines. The railroad was also important for transporting Confederate soldiers and supplies.

By this time, the state of West Virginia had joined the union—and the 2nd Regiment of Loyal Virginia Volunteer Cavalry was now known as the 2nd West Virginia Volunteer Cavalry Regiment. Seven companies of the cavalry regiment left Camp Piatt and joined with the 34th Ohio Volunteer Infantry (who were also mounted) to form a brigade. The cavalry totaled 365 men, while the infantry totaled 505. The cavalry's commander, Colonel William H. Powell, was second in command of the entire brigade. Colonel John T. Toland, from the 34th Ohio Infantry, was the brigade commander. During the trip to Wytheville, the Union force was joined (and resupplied) by two regiments from the 1st West Virginia Cavalry. One company from the 2nd West Virginia returned to camp with the empty supply wagons.

After several skirmishes and an aborted attempt to sever the rail line west of Wytheville, the brigade arrived at the town. Colonel Toland ordered three companies of cavalry to charge in columns down Wytheville's main street. This was not the preference of Colonel Powell, but Toland "vigorously renewed in unnecessary language" his order to Powell. This first group of Union cavalry was ambushed by a rebel group consisting of Confederate soldiers, Home Guard, and local citizens—who had been warned that a large group of Union horsemen was heading in their direction. Many of the local citizens fired their weapons at the cavalry from inside the cover of homes and businesses—while their targets had been ordered to ride in column down the town's fenced main street. One soldier called the street "an avenue of death".

Captain Dennis Delaney of the 1st West Virginia Cavalry was at the front of the Union charge, and he was shot dead. His First Lieutenant



Colonel William H. Powell

ant was mortally wounded. Both Colonels were shot within the first 10 minutes of the action. Colonel Powell was seriously wounded while he was with the lead group of three regiments, causing Colonel Toland to move to the front. With Powell disabled, Major John J. Hoffman became commander of the cavalry regiment. Hoffman was leading the second group of cavalymen that charged into the "avenue of death." He was thrown over his horse after it was killed from gunfire, which temporarily stunned him. His column was prevented from advancing because of numerous dead horses in the road—and also trapped on the street by fences. Colonel Toland arrived at the "avenue of death", and refused to take cover despite warnings from the cavalry regiment's Company H. He was shot through the heart by a marksman shooting from a two-story house.

The 2nd West Virginia, without its two cavalry leaders, became disorganized. The cavalry was led by company commanders (typically Captains or Lieutenants), who guided only their own company. The infantry commander, Lieutenant Colonel Freeman E. Franklin wisely

sent his infantry forward dismounted, and they were "not sitting ducks like the cavalry." Major Hoffman's portion of the cavalry, which was dismounted and trapped on the street, eventually pushed the fencing down. They were joined by infantry and fought from building to building. The Union soldiers burned the buildings that had been used by the rebels as cover when they shot at the blue-coated horsemen. Despite significant losses of horses and officers, the Union brigade was eventually able to secure the town. However, the Union Army did not achieve its major goals: little damage was done to the railroad, and the lead and salt mines were not damaged at all.

Fearing reinforcements from the Confederate army, especially after hearing a distant train whistle, the Union brigade left Wytheville less than 24 hours after it entered. The Union brigade retreated toward its camps in West Virginia, and repelled attacks on July 19 and 20. It reached the safety of Union lines at Fayetteville on July 23, having received no rations for four days. Losses for the entire excursion (including the trip to Wytheville and the return to camp) were 14 killed, 32 wounded, 17 taken prisoner, and 26 missing. An estimated 300 horses died.

Colonel Powell's wound received at Wytheville was judged to be fatal by surgeons for both the Union and Confederate armies. When the Union army departed from Wytheville, Powell was left behind with other wounded soldiers who could not be moved. These men became prisoners of the Confederacy. The citizens of Wytheville blamed Powell for the burning of many of the community's homes. For his own safety, Powell was hidden. Confederate General Sam Jones wanted Powell held accountable for the burning of two buildings from an earlier raid, and added that Powell was "... one of the most dangerous officers we have had to contend with ..." Surprisingly, Powell recovered enough from his wound that he was moved to a Richmond prison. While in captivity there, he was fed only bread and water, and slept on the floor. Lieutenant Colonel David Dove, who was recovering from a severe wound suffered earlier in the

year, returned to camp in October. During Powell's absence, Dove was in command of the regiment.

On November 8, 1864, the regiment left their Front Royal, Virginia camp for Martinsburg, West Virginia. They stopped near Winchester, Virginia, and voted in the presidential election. After a short period, 240 officers and enlisted men departed for Wheeling, West Virginia. These were the men who had completed their 3-year enlistment, and did not re-enlist. These men were discharged on November 28, 1864. Among those discharged was Lieutenant Colonel John J. Hoffman, commander of the regiment. General William H. Powell did not remain with the army much longer, as he resigned to attend to family issues. His resignation was reluctantly approved after a protest that the army could not afford to lose an officer of his quality, and he gave his farewell speech on January 10, 1865.



**UVA JOHN L. NAU III
CENTER FOR CIVIL WAR HISTORY
FESTIVAL OF THE BOOK EVENT**

Friday, March 22, 2019, 12:00 PM to 1:30 PM, UVA Special Collections Library Auditorium

The Nau Center is pleased to once again partner with the Virginia Festival of the Book by sponsoring a Civil War-era book panel at this year's festival. The 25th annual Virginia Festival of the Book will take place March 20-24, 2019 in Charlottesville.

The panel, "Civil War: Places, Politics, and Armies," will take place on Friday, March 22, at noon in the UVA Special Collections Library auditorium. Moderated by Corcoran Department of History Professor George H. Gilliam, it features the following three authors and their books:

Matthew Gallman, *Civil War Places: Seeing the Conflict through the Eyes of Its Leading Historians* (UNC Press)

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Upcoming

April 15, 2019

Eric Wittenberg

*The Battle of Brandy Station
June 9, 1863*

ROTUNDA ROOM

Westminster Canterbury of the Blue Ridge, Pantops

See: charlottesvillecwrt.org

Dinner Menu: Choice of
prime rib, grilled salmon,
or crab cakes

**Dinner is optional,
but reservations are required.**

Please respond to
Sandy von Thelen
971-8567 (W) or 202-7064 (H)
or make your reservation on the
webpage before 10:00 AM
Thursday, Mar 14th, 2019.

The Picket Post

The monthly newsletter of the Charlottesville-Albemarle County Civil War Round Table.

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Mailing Address:

CWRT
13 Canterbury Road
Charlottesville, VA, 22903

Stephen Maizlish, *A Strife of Tongues: The Compromise of 1850 and the Ideological Foundations of the American Civil War* (UVA Press)

Elizabeth Varon, *Armies of Deliverance: A New History of the Civil War* (Oxford University Press)

Please see the Festival's website for additional details. Books will be available for purchase and signing.

This event is free and open to the public. Paid parking is available nearby at the Central Grounds Parking Garage located near the UVA bookstore.



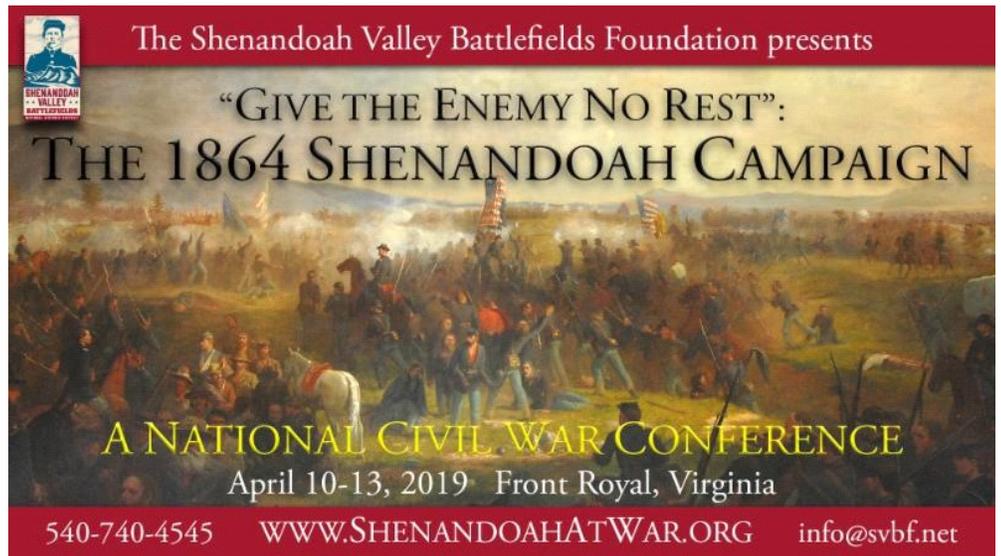
NAU 2019 SIGNATURE CONFERENCE THEATERS OF WAR

9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Harrison Institute and Small Special Collections Library

The John L. Nau III Center for Civil War History's 2019 Signature Conference will take place at UVA's Small Special Collections Library auditorium on Friday, March 29, 2019. Doors open at 9:00 AM, coffee and tea will be available, and introductory remarks will start at 9:45 AM with our first talk beginning at 10:00 AM. The full conference schedule follows below or downloaded at the Center's web site.

This year's theme is "Theaters of War." The speakers will examine both the East and West during the conflict. The conference lineup includes historians Gary W. Gallagher, Stephen Cushman, Christopher Phillips, Tamika Nunley, and William Kurtz. Elizabeth Varon and Caroline Janney will moderate a round table discussion at the end of the conference.

The conference is free and open to the public and no advance registration is required. Paid parking



is available nearby at the Central Grounds Parking Garage located next to the UVA bookstore. Copies of the speakers' books will be available for purchase and there will be a chance to meet the authors and have your book signed during the lunch break or after the final panel. Please visit the website for the latest updates.

Session 1

- 9:00: Doors Open
- 9:45: Opening Remarks from Caroline E. Janney
- 10:00-10:40: Gary W. Gallagher, University of Virginia, Emeritus, "Central and Peripheral: Assessing the Importance of Theaters during the Civil War"
- 10:50-11:30: Tamika Nunley, Oberlin College, "'I wore the uniform of those men in Blue': Making the Case for African American Enlistment"
- 11:40-12:20: Stephen Cushman, University of Virginia, "Mark Twain's Mississippi Theater"
- 12:20-1:20: Books Available for Purchase -- Break for Lunch

Session 2

- 1:30-2:10: William B. Kurtz, University of Virginia, "General Rosecrans's Wars: In-fighting in the Union High Command"
- 2:20-3:00: Christopher Phillips, University of Cincinnati, "The Western Way of War"
- 3:10-4:10: Roundtable, "Do Theaters Matter?", Moderators Elizabeth R. Varon and Caroline E. Janney
- 4:15: Concluding Remarks from Caroline E. Janney



2019 National Conference: "Give the Enemy No Rest": The 1864 Shenandoah Campaign

Based in Front Royal, Virginia (April 10-13, 2019)

The Shenandoah Valley Battlefields Foundation's 4th Annual National Civil War Conference will focus on Sheridan's 1864 Shenandoah Campaign, the largest and costliest campaign ever fought in the Valley. The conference will include talks, programs, special events, and tours of Third Winchester, Fisher's Hill, and Cedar Creek - all featuring the finest historians in the nation.

Guides and speakers will include Gary Ecelbarger, Caroline E. Janney, Robert K. Krick, William Miller, Jonathan A. Noyalas, Scott C. Patchan, Ralph Peters, Nicholas Picerno, and Jeffry Wert.

The cost for the full conference is \$425 for SVBF members, \$475 for non-members. Guests can also choose one or more individual days with a la carte pricing.

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