The Regimental Bulletin

Phil Kearny Civil War Round Table of Northern New Jersey

Volume 19 Issue 8

Oct 18, 2023

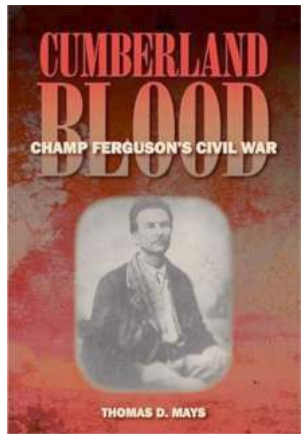
**** * * NEXT MEETING ******
Wed, Oct 18th @ - 7PM - Online Zoom Presentation

Change in our line up with a New Speaker

Cumberline Blood: Champ Ferguson's Civil War

Speaker: Thomas D. Mays

By the end of the Civil War, Champ Ferguson had become a notorious criminal whose likeness covered the front pages of Harper's Weekly, Leslie's Illustrated, and other newspapers across the country. His crime? Using the war as an excuse to steal, plunder, and murder Union civilians and soldiers.



Cumberland Blood: Champ Ferguson's Civil War offers insights into Ferguson's lawless brutality and a lesser-known aspect of the Civil War, the bitter guerrilla conflict in the Appalachian highlands, extending from the Carolinas through Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia. This compelling volume delves into the violent story of Champ Ferguson, who acted independently of the Confederate army in a personal war that eventually garnered the censure of Confederate officials.

Author Thomas D. Mays traces Ferguson's life in the Cumberland highlands of southern Kentucky, where even before the Civil War began he had a reputation as a vicious killer.

Ferguson, a rising slave owner, sided with the Confederacy while many of his neighbors and family members took up arms for the Union. For Ferguson and others in the highlands, the war would not be decided on the distant fields of Shiloh or Gettysburg: it would be local and personal.

Cumberland Blood describes how Unionists drove Ferguson from his home in Kentucky into Tennessee, where he banded together with other like-minded Southerners to drive the Unionists from the region. Northern sympathizers responded, and a full-scale guerrilla war erupted along the border in 1862. Mays notes that Ferguson's status in the army was never clear, and he skillfully details how raiders picked up Ferguson's gang to work as guides and scouts. In 1864, Ferguson and his gang were incorporated into the Confederate army, but the rogue soldier continued operating as an outlaw, murdering captured Union prisoners after the Battle of Saltville, Virginia.

Cumberland Blood, enhanced by twenty-one illustrations, is an illuminating assessment of one of the Civil War's most ruthless men.

Ferguson's arrest, trial, and execution after the war captured the attention of the nation in 1865, but his story has been largely forgotten. Cumberland Blood: Champ Ferguson's Civil War returns the story of Ferguson's private civil war to its place in history.

Dr Thomas D. Mays

You must register with this new link before the meeting
https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYrcu6qpzkpGNxXNMly2dBxgJTUcjXvGj4L#/registration

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Send your dues to:
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Visit
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Annual PKCWRT Gettysburg Trip

Friday, Nov 3rd - Sunday, Nov 5th 2023

HQ at Best Western in Gettysburg

CHANGE OF PLANS FOR SATURDAY'S TOUR
Saturday Morning - November 4th 2023

Due to logistical issues we have decided to simplify and change our tour to the **First Day's Barlow's Knoll, July 1, 1863.**

We will group at the Best Western's lobby on Friday evening to discuss the following morning's tour and other possible other options while enjoying each others company and perhaps a few libations.

We still have the renown Gettysburg Battlefield Licensed Guide Jim Hessler giving our morning tour. As we have done in the past, we asked all members and guest on the tour kick in $20 (or more with tip) each for the overall cost for the tour.

Saturday night we have booked the Dobbin House, details below.

A Message from Norm Dykstra, PKCWRT Treasurer

Dear Members and Friends,

It has been a long-standing tradition of the PKCWRT to have dinner together on the Saturday night during our GBurg battlefield visit weekend. It is a "Dutch treat" affair *(ie: individual checks)* in a local restaurant where we can enjoy a good meal and share our weekend adventures…..and misadventures!

This year we plan to return to the historic Dobbin House, just a few blocks from the Best Western, but we need to determine how many of you will be attending. **Please let Norm know as soon as you can (by 3 November at the latest) if you will be joining us on 4 November at 7 PM.** Norm's email address is: **Normandy1@verizon.net.**

Also, we would like to remind everyone to renew membership and pay dues. We do appreciate everyone who has already paid, but if you have not yet sent in your check for 2023 - now is the perfect time.

With your membership and continued support it assists in the Phil Kearny Civil War Round Table program costs to delivery you quality speakers with fresh topics as well as helps with our overhead expenses.

PKCWRT will remain online Zoom Meetings until further notice

PKCWRT 2023 Schedule

For updates, and changes please visit PhilKearnyCWRT.org

Wed, Oct 18th - 7pm
Thomas D, Mays
Champ Ferguson's Civil War
https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZYrcu6qpzkpGNxXNMly2dBxgJTUcjXvGj4L#/registration

Annual Gettysburg Trip
Nov 4th
with Jim Hessler
Barlow's Knoll
Dobbin House Dinner

Wed, Nov 15th -7pm
Lynn Herman
The New Mexico Campaign
https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAvceytpzMtHND34Qhbh1qP4a39Xd8r_HGz#/registration

Dinner Holiday Dinner
Sat, Dec 2nd - 1pm
Robert E. Crickenberger
Point Lookout Prison Camp, MD
Presenting newly discovered research showing Point Lookout was the largest prison camp for either side

Please send Norm your reservations for the Holiday Dinner

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Reconsidering Barlow's Knoll

by Jon Tracey

The First Division of the Eleventh Corps of the Army of the Potomac arrived in Gettysburg on the afternoon of July 1, 1863. Only 29 years old, Brigadier General Francis Barlow commanded the division. He resented the men he commanded, writing home of his "indignation & disgust of the miserable behavior of the 11th Corps," unfairly blaming them for the loss at Chancellorsville. There, the corps was assigned a position that they could not hold against overwhelming Confederate forces. The same thing would happen again on July 1.

As the division moved into the fields north of town, Barlow spotted Blocher's Knoll, which now bears his name, a small, raised hill one mile from his assigned position. Without orders, he moved his division to take it. Major General Carl Schurz, acting commander of the corps, had ordered him to hold Third Division commander Brigadier General Alexander Schimmelfennig's flank. Without telling his commander, Barlow decided to advance his line. Technically he may have followed the letter of the order, as he deployed near Schimmelfennig's skirmishers, but it absolutely ignored the intent. This new position was significantly longer than his initial one. This is the only real raised position in the area, but new Confederate arrivals would soon make this position untenable.

Brigadier General Francis C. Barlow
Division commander at Gettysburg

Barlow ordered Col. Leopold von Gilsa's small brigade of 900 men to take the heights. 400 New Yorkers from the 54th and 68th New York advanced as skirmishers, and the large, 500 man 153rd Pennsylvania, a 9-month regiment nearing the end of their enlistment, was held in reserve, though some companies joined the New Yorkers on the skirmish line. First, they had to push back the Confederates skirmishers and sharpshooters on the knoll. The Union troops did so, forcing them into the woods and across Rock Creek. Then, they formed their defensive position.

Once formed, their line consisted of skirmishers set along the waters of Rock Creek and Blocher's Run. There weren't enough men, so they were spread out to about one man every two yards, and the dense underbrush made it difficult to fire at oncoming Confederates until they were dangerously close. This thin line was supported by a rear line that bent to an angle along the knoll. Brigadier General Adelbert Ames' brigade deployed behind the knoll as support. Exposed Union forces soon came under fire by Confederate artillery, then Brigadier General John Gordon's infantry brigade launched their assault on the Union lines.

Gordon wrote of his attack on the creek: "Moving forward under heavy fire over rail and plank fences, and crossing a creek whose banks were so abrupt as to prevent a passage except at certain points, this brigade rushed upon the enemy with a resolution and spirit, in my opinion, rarely excelled. The enemy made a most obstinate resistance until the colors of the two lines were separated by a space of less than 50 paces, when his line was broken and driven back."

Despite the negative reputation the Eleventh Corps had acquired, Private Nichols of the 61st GA also commented on the obstinance of the Union troops, stating "We had a hard time moving them. We advanced with our accustomed yell, but they stood firm until we got near them. They then began to retreat in fire order, shooting at us as they retreated. They were harder to drive than we had ever known them before. Men were being mowed down in great numbers on both sides." It's worth noting Confederate command and foot soldiers both recorded the strong fight that the outnumbered Union soldiers made. Barlow had ordered artillery from Lieutenant Bayard Wilkeson's battery to support the knoll, but it was not enough. As Gordon attacked the Union line, Brigadier General George Doles's brigade, numbering another 1400 men, then assaulted the left.

As the Georgians approached, the rest of the 153rd Pennsylvania was rushed up to reinforce the line. Now, Von Gilsa's 900 men faced nearly double their number, holding a skirmish line rather than a compact line of battle. Slowly but steadily, this outnumbered brigade was forced to retreat. As one soldier of the 153rd retreated through the woods, he remembered seeing the Union dead: "They were piled in every shape, some on their backs, some on their faces, and others turned and twisted in every imaginable shape." They had paid a terrible price.

A small marker for the 54th New York Infantry, marking the skirmish line near Rock Creek. This is likely one of the least visited monuments on the battlefield

Then Ames's reinforcements attempted to hold steady in vain. Soon, they too were in retreat. More Confederate troops had arrived from the east, and now Barlow's troops were not only greatly outnumbered but now under attack on two sides. In this chaos, Barlow fell to the ground grievously wounded and was left behind. Allegedly, John Gordon himself spoke to the wounded Barlow and found him aid. The story of Barlow and Gordon reuniting post-war, both thinking the other had died, is one of the more famous anecdotes of Gettysburg, though how truthful these tales are is uncertain.

As Barlow's brigades fell back, other units from the Eleventh Corps were thrown into the fray, forming new positions. One by one, they too were overwhelmed. One Union brigade commander rode the line during the battle, describing his men as "sweaty, blackened by gunpowder, and they looked more like animals than human beings." To him the "portrait of battle was the portrait of hell." Finally, scattered remnants of many groups rallied into one last position near the almshouse. Though a worthy effort, the final line collapsed. Ames recalled "The whole division was failing back with little or no regularity, regimental organizations having become destroyed." As shown through these firsthand quotes, the men of the Eleventh Corps had done their best to hold, but Barlow had put them in an impossible situation, deploying them along too long a line in a position exposed to attack.

Von Gilsa's brigade was spread thin and assaulted on two flanks, and they had put up as much of a fight as was reasonably possible. They had been unable to hold the knoll and had been defeated. Attempts to stem the tide had failed, as two more brigades fell to the Confederate onslaught. Now, the entire right of the Eleventh Corps had collapsed into disorder. Despite this valiant and obstinate effort, Barlow's Division was unable to hold this position. At the knoll, they valiantly attempted to erase the stain of their defeat at Chancellorsville, only to be defeated and add to the unjust reputation their corps acquired in 1863. Perhaps on your next visit to Gettysburg you'll come visit this less popular portion of the battlefield or venture down the knoll to the banks of the creek to one of the least visited monuments on the field and consider their efforts.

Consider supporting Emerging Civil War visit:

https://emergingcivilwar.com/mission-statement/

References

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Harry W. Pfanz. Gettysburg: The First Day. University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

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James S. Pula. Under the Crescent Moon with the XI Corps in the Civil War: Volume 2 From Gettysburg to Victory 1863-1865. Savas Beatie, 2018.

Phil Kearny Civil War Round Table

Membership Form

Dues are $25 a year

Please send a check or money order payable to:

The Phil Kearny Round Table

% Norm Dykstra

77 Walray, North Haledon, NJ 07508 email: Normandy1@verizon.net

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