

17th Annual Reenactment 2006 Neshaminy State Park Bensalem, PA.

Historical Background
Neshaminy State Park, Bensalem, PA
April 29 – 30, 2006

“Action on the Upper Potomac, 1861”

Featuring:

Saturday, April 29th: the Battle of Ball’s Bluff, Va.
Sunday, April 30th: the Battle of Bolivar Heights, Va.

The Battle of Ball’s Bluff Oct. 21, 1861

The Federal army then forming around Washington was assigned the task of guarding the fords and ferry-points along the Potomac river north of the capital city, and to observe the movements of the Confederate forces on the other bank.

The “Pennsylvania Reserves”, a Division commanded by Gen. George McCall was located near Langley, Va. Was advanced toward Dranesville, south of Leesburg, attempting to drive enemy forces in the area, principally under the command of Confederate General Nathan “Shanks” Evans back across the mountains.

In order to cooperate with this movement, Gen. McClellan, Federal army commander ordered Gen. Charles Stone to make a ‘slight demonstration’ with his Division, posted above Leesburg on the Maryland side.

In command of the 1st Brigade of Stone’s Division was Col. Edward Baker, a sitting U.S. senator from Oregon, a personal friend of President Lincoln, and an inexperienced politician recently commissioned in the army.

Baker was ordered to cross the Potomac with elements of his Brigade and threaten the enemy supposed to be at Leesburg. Baker could then either withdraw his troops, or reinforce them, as circumstances might dictate. Baker immediately began to cross elements of his Brigade by way of Harrison’s Island in the river, scaled the height at Ball’s Bluff opposite, and attempted to push forward, without having reconnoitered the enemy, or without enough boats to move his troops back and forth adequately.

Gen. Stone had begun sending small bodies of soldiers across the river to the Virginia shore to scout the enemy position, and make the ordered ‘slight demonstration’. One of the detachments was under the command of Capt. Philbrick, who was from the 15th Mass. Regiment. They crossed the river, climbed the bluff, scouted ahead in the dark, and found what Capt. Philbrick thought was an enemy camp, composed of 30 Sibley tents left unguarded. Later, these tents would be found to be haystacks! He returned to report the find to Gen. Stone.

Stone surmised that the Confederates might indeed be retreating, and accordingly launched a double ‘reconnaissance-in-force’ to ascertain the state of affairs and be ready to act decisively if circumstances proved favorable.

Stone sent several companies of soldiers across the river at Edward’s Ferry, where he supervised in person; and sent 5 companies of the 15th Mass. under its colonel, Charles Devens to cross at Ball’s Bluff. Devens began to cross at midnight of October 21st using 3 small boats holding 10 men each. The crossing lasted 4 hours. Devens formed his ca. 300

men, and advanced to destroy the Confederate camp reported earlier by one of his own officers. After he completed this duty, he was to return to the safety of Harrison's Island. Later, an additional 100 men of the 20th Mass Regiment were sent across to join Devens.

At daybreak, Devens set out to destroy the unguarded Camp, but the Camp could not be found. It had been a mistake, though Devens aggressively pushed on to the outskirts of Leesburg, but encountered no enemy forces.

Evans, the Confederate brigade commander was then encamped just south of Leesburg with his 2000 man brigade. He had moved there earlier to dispute the advance of the Penna. Reserves from Dranesville. Evans had pickets out covering all approaches to Leesburg, and some had observed the Federal crossing.

About 7am, some of Evans' outposts encountered advancing troops of Devens' in a cornfield, and a sharp firefight broke out. Both sides sent in reinforcements. Under increasing pressure, Devens began to fall back, and was joined by the remaining companies of the 20th Mass. Regiment who had continued to cross the river. Thus reinforced, Devens counterattacked and attempted to move forward.

Skirmishing went on most of the morning. At about 12 noon the tide of battle turned to the Confederates. Although Gen. Evans had been imbibing freely all morning, and was intoxicated, he was still an experienced veteran and a hero of 1st Manassas, as well as a good tactician. Evans concentrated his forces at Ball's Bluff to counter the more serious threat there, rather than at Edward's Ferry.

Slowly, the Federals fell back under increasing pressure to a large field fronting the Bluff. There Col. Baker stood overseeing the arrival of more men struggling up the steep Bluff. Baker commanded a provisional Brigade, but had recruited a Brigade of troops in Philadelphia whose first regiment he called the 1st California, though later became the 71st Penna. Regiment. He sought to honor his own connection to the west and demonstrate its loyalty to the Union. Baker originally envisioned a full California Brigade to be composed of five California Regiments, BUT raised in his old home of Philadelphia. This Brigade would later become the famous "Philadelphia" Brigade of the II Corps.

Stone had sent Col. Baker to assume command on the field, to either reinforce the Federals there, or order a withdrawal, as circumstances would dictate. Baker decided to stay and fight, and began to deploy his men of the 1st California and the 42nd New York, the "Tammany" Regiment, raised in New York City by the dominant Democratic Party machine, as the Mass. men fell back to that position. Baker formed his line across the open field with both flanks curved back into the woods, but the position was a poor one, commanded by the higher ground in his front, and his line imperfectly drawn to allow maximum fire from the enemy, while his own men's fire was obstructed. Baker ignored the advice of professional soldiers about him, and determined doggedly to hold on. At this time Col. Baker could call on approximately 1700 troops.

The Confederates formed a crescent shaped arc confronting the Federals with the 8th Va., 13th, 17th and 18th Mississippi regiments, but these men were veterans of the 1st Battle of Manassas.

Baker had been able to bring over some artillery: 2 mountain howitzers, and a James gun, which had to be manhandled over the river and up the Bluff pulled by hand, delaying the arrival of much needed infantry support. The guns opened upon the enemy and did good execution, but were improperly placed to the front unsupported, and the Rebels were able to pick off the gunners.

Steadily, the Rebels advanced, the fighting succeeded in killing and wounding many. This included the colonel of the 18th Miss.; Isaac Wistar, commander of the 1st Calf., and a

personal friend and law partner of Baker, who was shot in the arm; and a young lieutenant in the 20th Mass, fresh from Harvard, wounded, who would one day become a justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, Oliver Wendell Holmes.

Col. Baker was fearless in action, “indifferent to bullets”. At about 4:30pm, Baker was standing 10 paces in front of his line urging his men on, when a Confederate jumped out of the woods near by and fired four pistol balls into him. Instantly, seeing the commander go down, the Confederates surged forward to gain the body, and a hand-to-hand struggle erupted before Baker’s own men were able to push the Rebels back and retrieve his body. They sent it back across the river to safety, eventually to lie in state in cities through the country, and enjoy a hero’s funeral.

The beleaguered Federals were now pressed on 3 sides, forcing them back onto the Bluff. The new commander, Col. Cogswell of the 42nd N.Y. wanted to avoid a disaster, and break out of the encirclement by cutting through on the left flank and following the river bank to a safer place of fording. He, accordingly ordered an assault on the left, but in a strange twist of fate, at that very moment, an officer rode up in front of the left flank, waved his hat and shouted: “come on, Boys!” The Federals responded with a yell and a rush pell-mell forward, but the officer proved to be a Confederate, who mistook the men for his own. Union officers desperately sought to stop their men, who advanced into a burst of enemy fire. This fluke of fate ended any hope for a breakout on the left. It seemed a Union success was doomed.

Cogswell could only order his men to the Bluff to prepare for evacuation. As the Federals fell back to the edge, the Confederates massed for an assault, and the Mississippians charged, their colonel shouting: “drive them into the Potomac, or into eternity!”

The two lines now joined in mortal combat. The color bearer of the 8th Va. Was shot down at the Federal line. Men in Blue began to flee down the Bluff under heavy fire. Others leapt over the brim, and threw themselves into the river. A shameless route ensued. The scene was one of chaos, some swimming, others scrambling onto the few boats which quickly capsized, throwing all into the water which bubbled and foamed with men beseeching help.

Col. Devens ordered his men to throw away their arms and equipment and swim for it. Devens himself got across safely floating over on a log with some of his men.

From on top the Bluff, the Confederates continued to fire into the boiling mass of fleeing survivors. They kept on firing until “darkness shut in the bloody work and night in mercy drew her sable curtain over the dead”.

The Federal loss was over 500 prisoners; 50 were found dead on the field with over 200 wounded, but over 100 were drowned in the river, some of their bodies washing ashore days later miles downstream.

The Confederate losses were relatively light: 36 killed; 117 wounded; and 2 missing. The disaster at Ball’s Bluff shocked and saddened the nation. A scapegoat had to be found. It was Gen. Stone, who would endure arrest, incarceration, and humiliation for his blunder, while others who deserved to share the blame, such as McClellan were left unscathed.

As a direct result of this fiasco, a congressional investigation into the affair was launched, which led to the formation of the notorious Joint Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War. This Committee’s work would become a political tool of the Radical Republicans throughout the rest of the war.

Forces at Ball's Bluff

USA:

Infantry

1st California (71st Penna.)

15th Mass.

19th Mass.

20th Mass

42nd N.Y.

Cavalry: orderlies, guards, pickets, staff

Artillery

Battery I, 1st U.S.: 2 mountain howitzers (Lt. French)

Battery B, 1st R.I.: 1 6 lb-er (Lt. Bramhall)

6th N.Y. Battery: 2 6-lb-ers

Losses:

Killed: 49

Wounded: 158

Captured, missing or drowned: 714

Total: 921

Confederate

Infantry

8th Virginia

13th Miss

17th Miss

18th Miss

Cavalry: elements of Virginia Cavalry

Artillery: elements of Virginia Artillery Batteries; and those posted in fortifications

Losses:

Killed: 33

Wounded: 115

Missing: 1

Total: 149

Notes:

Col. Baker had emigrated to the U.S from England as a boy. He settled in Philadelphia, had done well, had become a lawyer, worked with Lincoln, then settled in the west, where he served as a U.S. Senator from California, and then later from Oregon. He was still serving in the Senate when he was killed at Ball's Bluff.

During the fighting near the Bluff, all the canoneers were out of action, and some of the officers then worked the guns, including Col. Baker.

Edwin Baker had been commissioned a General by Congress, but had yet to accept the Commission, so at Ball's Bluff, he was serving as a Colonel.

During the hand-to-hand combat near the end of the Battle, the Color Bearer of the California Regiment (71st Penna.): “..boldly held fast to his colors, waved them in front of the line, cheering his men to the defense of their flag”.

On the 23rd of October, the Federals asked for and received a truce for the purpose of burying the dead left on the field. Elements of some of the units engaged were sent over to Ball’s Bluff to bury their unfortunate comrades left behind. They now rest in the National Cemetery there.

The Camps at Neshaminy will portray the regimental camps of the respective forces at along the Upper Potomac and Centreville, Va. for the October Campaign on the Upper Potomac, featuring the Battle of “Ball’s Bluff”; and the Battle of “Bolivar Heights”.

The Fight at Bolivar Heights

Early in the morning of the 16th the rebels showed themselves on Bolivar Heights, overlooking the ferry, and commenced an attack with ordnance upon three companies of the Thirteenth Massachusetts, under Major Gould, stationed on the north side of the river. The firing was kept up for about three hours, when three companies of the Third Wisconsin crossed the river, charged upon the enemy, and succeeded in capturing one of their cannon. They subsequently retreated in good order to the river, where they were reinforced by three companies of the Twenty-eighth Pennsylvania, and, under command of Colonel Geary, charged again upon the enemy, driving them from their position, and recapturing the [cannon](#)—a 32-pounder Columbiad—with which they returned across the river. Our forces had but three pieces of artillery, served on the north side of the river, while the enemy had seven pieces, together with a force of infantry and five hundred cavalry. They were completely routed, and driven back some three miles. Our loss was about seven killed and wounded, while that of the enemy was not less than one hundred and fifty, including Colonel Ashby, who was in command.

Parties who arrived at Baltimore on 18th from [Harper's Ferry](#) report that the rebels had renewed their attack on the Union forces under Major Gould, on Linden and Bolivar Heights, and that the fight was still going on. Major Gould felt confident that he could maintain his ground until reinforcements arrived.

Harper's Weekly, November 2, [1861](#) BOLIVAR HEIGHTS, VIRGINIA

Action: 16 October 1861

OR- Series I, Volume V, Chapter XIV, Pg 238

UNION FORCES

COLONEL JOHN W. GEARY Gould's Command – Major J. G. Gould

- 3 Companies, 3rd Wisconsin Infantry
- Company A --- Captain Henry Bertram
- Company C --- Lieutenant O'Brien
- Company H --- Captain George J. Whitman
- 1 Section, Rhode Island Battery --- Captain Thompkins
- Geary's Command – Colonel John W. Geary
- 3 Companies, 13th Massachusetts Infantry
- 4 Companies, 28th Pennsylvania Infantry
- Company A
- Company D
- Company F --- Captain Copeland
- Company G
- 5 Companies, 28th Pennsylvania Infantry --- Major Tyndale
- (Companies unknown)
- 3 Companies, 3rd Wisconsin Infantry
- Company A --- Captain Henry Bertram
- Company C --- Lieutenant Moses O'Brien
- Company H --- Captain George Whitman

- 3 Companies, 13th Massachusetts Infantry
- Company C
- Company I
- Company K
- Artillery
- Section, 9th New York Artillery --- Lieutenant Martin

CASUALTIES= Killed- 4, Wounded- 7, Missing- 2 **CONFEDERATE FORCES**

BRIGADIER GENERAL NATHAN GEORGE “Shanks” EVANS' Brigade Evans' Brigade

- 13th Mississippi Infantry Regiment
- 19th Mississippi Infantry Regiment
- 8th Virginia Infantry Regiment
- Roger's Battery

Ashby's Command - Lieutenant Colonel Turner Ashby

- Wingfield's Company (McDonalds Regt) --- Captain Wingfield
- Miller's Cavalry Company (McDonalds Regt) --- Captain Miller
- Turner's Cavalry Company
- Mason's Cavalry Company
- Albert's Virginia Militia Regiment --- Captain Albert
- Finter's Virginia Militia Regiment --- Major Finter
- Henderson's Cavalry (McDonald's Regt) --- Lieutenant Glynn
- Baylor's Virginia Militia --- Captain Baylor
- Hess' Virginia Militia --- Captain Hess
- 1 Gun --- Captain Avirette
- 1 Gun --- Captain Comfield

CASUALTIES= Killed-1, Wounded- 13

**Civil War Reenactment
at Neshaminy State Park
April 29-30, 2006
Sponsored by: 28th. Penna. Regiment,
1st Battalion ANV, Bensalem Historical Society,
G.A.R. Civil War Museum and the Delaware Valley Civil War Round Table.**

**Our 17th year!
Bringing history alive to
educate and inform.**

This year's program includes The Battle of Ball's Bluff, Oct. 21, 1861 featured on Saturday, April 29th, and The Battle of Bolivar Heights, Oct. 16, 1861 featured on Sunday, April 30th.

In producing our historical program of Civil War history, the committee has attempted to select battles or parts of battles in which the number of participants on the field approximates the actual number that were engaged historically, usually representing brigades. In addition we try to select an action where local troops (Bucks Co., Philadelphia.) were involved, in order to connect history to the local area, and we also try to feature the less famous battles which, none-the-less deserve to be recalled.

This year, 2006 we have selected two actions which occurred around the same time and near each other: the Battle of Ball's Bluff, Leesburg, Va. Oct. 21, 1861; and The Battle of Bolivar Heights, Harpers Ferry, Va (now: W.Va.) Oct. 16, 1861.

1861 was selected because this year is the 145th anniversary of all events of that year, and these actions involved local troops.

Although by later standards, these "battles" hardly qualify as skirmishes, involving few troops with short casualty lists, and remain obscure, they were at the time important events of national significance.

October, 1861 is the early war period, when untrained, volunteer armies were preparing for a short war and any positive news was seized upon as a 'great' victory or 'bitter' defeat.

The Union Army of the Potomac, just then being organized by Gen. McClellan was posted along the Maryland shore of the Potomac facing its Confederate counterpart, ironically also named Army of the Potomac at this time, under Gen. Beauregard, staring across from the Virginia side..

The Union defeat at the 1st Battle of Bull Run happened just four months before, Robert E. Lee and the famous Army of Northern Virginia lies a year in the future.

In October, 1861 it is "All Quiet on the Potomac" as suggested by the title of a popular song of this period, with only an occasional foray or reconnaissance-in-force across the river.

Uniforms were gay and bright, some of the Union wore gray and some Rebels in blue. There are even French style Zouaves about and war is still a fun adventure. The carnage and butchery are yet to come.

Our featured actions this year represent two such incidents involving the 28th. Penna. Regiment under Col. John Geary at Bolivar Heights, an early Union victory, and the 71st. Penna. Regiment, or, as it was called at the time the 1st California under the ill-fated Col. Edward Baker at Ball's Bluff, a stunning Union disaster.

Both regiments were recruited and trained in Philadelphia and both contained numerous Bucks Countians.

We hope you will enjoy our reenactment this year which also features an extensive period civilian program as well as sutlers (military merchants) entertainment and something for all.

Donations collected at the event benefit our sponsoring organizations as well as a special beneficiary to be named later. So, please be generous!

Neshaminy Event Committee

**Battle of Ball's Bluff near Leesburg, Va
Oct. 21, 1861**

**location: Conrad's Ferry, Va, Harrison's Island
Ball's Bluff near Leesburg, Va.**

force:

**CSA: Evans' Brigade, 8th Va., 13th Miss., 17th Miss.,
18th Miss. cavalry: 4th Va.**

artillery: Richmond Battery

USA: Baker's Brigade, 1st California (71st P.V.)

Gorman's Brigade: 15th Mass., 42nd N.Y., 19th

Mass. artillery: section: Bunting's N.Y. Batt., (Lt.

**Bramball) section: Vaughan's 3rd R.I. Batt., cavalry
guards and orderlies**

Gen. Charles Stone, commanding corps of observation, Poolesville, Md. received word of a Rebel force on the Virginia shore and ordered a reconnaissance in force composed of the 15th Mass. Regiment to cross the Potomac at Conrad's Ferry, ascend Ball's Bluff, attack and surprise an enemy camp that had been found and destroy it, then return to Harrison's Island in the river.

Orders were also sent to Col. Edward Baker to move the 1st California to the crossing, ready to move with the rest of M's brigade.

Col. Devens crossed his 15th Mass. Regiment over the Potomac, climbed the bluff and reached the position of the alleged enemy camp, which proved to be only an illusion.

Col. Baker was assigned command of the operation and moved over to Harrison's Island where he was to take charge of transportation, post the artillery and decide whether to continue and reinforce the reconnaissance toward Leesburg or to retire the troops under cover and safety back to Maryland.

Baker was cautioned however not to attack unless the enemy was smaller than his own force, to support the artillery with good troops, and positions on the bluff were pointed out to him for the effective placement of the guns.

Col. Edward Baker, then also serving as senator from Oregon and a confidant of Pres. Lincoln, but untrained in the military, although a brave and energetic officer made the rash decision to cross his whole force over the river without taking the precautions of securing sufficient transportation, guarding the boats and approaches, or scouting the ground.

On the morning of Oct. 21, 1861 the advanced guard of the 15th Mass. Regt. encountered elements of the 17th Miss. Regiment and a strong cavalry force. A sharp skirmish broke out and the Union troops fell back on their reserve in good order, then advancing and firing again.

At about 12:30 p.m. the Rebels appeared in force in front of the 15th Mass. which was resisted for a time until outflanked, when the regiment was retired in good order with the approval of Col. Baker who was at the front and had assumed command.

The 15th Mass. finally fell back to the line established by Baker near the steep bluffs on open ground, surrounded by rises covered with woods. Baker's force composed of the 20th Mass. and 1st California (71st P.V.) now augmented by the 15th formed and awaited attack.

The enemy under General "Shanks" Evans attacked at 3PM with great vigor and a general battle developed.

At first, the Federals maintained the line with heavy fire and additional reinforcements from the 42nd N.Y. "Tamany" Regiment and several guns which were manhandled into position.

But Col. Baker had formed his line in a very faulty position entirely exposed to the enemy who poured in a destructive fire, silencing the Union guns and forcing their withdrawal.

At 4 pm Col. Baker, riding across the front of his line from right to left was struck by four bullets and fell dead while cheering on his men.

The Confederates attacked both Union flanks and succeeded in driving them back to the vicinity of the bluff overlooking the Potomac. At this point, around 6pm, Gen. Evans ordered an advance along his whole line which routed the Federals who fled precipitously over the bluff, or surrendered, crying out for quarter. Here many Union troops were killed and wounded by the bayonet.

The rout was now complete and the Union soldiers rushed into the water, capsized by overcrowding the few boats available and many were drowned. Many threw their arms and equipment into the river to prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy. Some escaped, by swimming to the Island or floating on logs, but many surrendered or were shot down.

Attempts were then undertaken to rally the fugitives, entrench positions on the Island and Maryland shore in case of an advance, and reinforcements ordered up.

Incidents of the battle:

1. Gen. Charles Stone ordered any soldier straggling for curiosity or plunder, or acquiring private property to be instantly shot.
2. Col. Edward Baker was an enormously popular political figure whose death in the battle brought much outcry against Gen. Charles Stone. But Col. Baker was totally deficient in military training and by improper disposition of the troops and exceeding and disregarding orders actually caused the defeat and rout.
3. Col. Baker had approx. 1700 men under at his command at Ball's Bluff.
4. Several days after the fighting a truce was arranged to send supplies to the Federal wounded at Leesburg and to obtain the bodies of some officers.
5. USA casualties: 49 KIA, 158 w., 714 m. Total = 921
6. Toward the end of the action during an attempt to cut their way out, a Confederate officer wearing blue appeared in front of the 42nd N.Y. Regiment and ordered them to change into a superior force of the enemy.

The charge of the 42nd N.Y. prompted other scattered units to advance as well, which disordered the Union line and resulted in the recall of all troops who were repulsed and broken. It was with difficulty that the line was reformed.

7. In order to prevent further panic and defend against attack, the 15th Mass. was deployed as skirmishers across the river banks.
8. Under flag of truce, a burial detail was dispatched to the Va. shore to bury the Union dead. Due to an apparent misunderstanding, the Rebels threatened to retain the party as prisoners. Details were worked out however and the party returned.
9. During the action, the Union forces had 1 12-1b, canon and 2 mountain howitzers but the guns were only able to deliver a few shots, when the canon's recoil carried it

down the bluff to the river bank, and the gunners were all shot down. The guns all fell into the hands of the enemy.

10. The color sergeant of the 71st P.V. distinguished himself greatly in the battle by boldly holding fast to the colors, waving them defiantly in front of the line and cheering on the men to the defense of their flag.

11. Col. Baker was standing on the left looking at a mounted enemy officer riding out in front of the line. Drawing fire from the Federals, he seemed to be falling from his horse. Col. Baker shouted, "See he falls", and he himself immediately fell pierced with 4 balls. A Rebel tried to take his sword, but a party of Union troops rushed up and shot the Rebel in the head and retrieved Baker and his effects.

12. The Confederates under Gen. Evans comprised the 13th Miss., 17th Miss., and 8 Va. They attacked Baker with the 13th and 17th Miss. and 8th Va. in front and the 18th Miss. on the right.

Evans' force numbered 1700. Among the Confederate dead was Col. E.R. Burt of the 18th Miss. regiment.

CSA casualties: 36 KIA, 117 w., 2 m. Total = 155

13. Col. Featherston, 17th Miss, ordered his troops forward, 'charge Mississipians, charge!' Drive them into the Potomac or into eternity!"

As the Union troops advanced, and were hailed by the Confederates as to who they were. They shouted, "friends", but continued to advance, at which the Rebels kneeled, and fired, staggering the line of Infantry.

The embarrassing defeat and debacle at Ball's Bluff had immediate and long term repercussions in the North, the press and in the government. Gen. Stone, the commanding general was disgraced, arrested and imprisoned and cashiered. The radical element of the Republican Party was able to establish a Committee on the conduct of the war which became a witch hunt for the rest of the War primarily to advance their extreme agenda. Edward Baker became one of the first heroes of the war and was mourned nationally.

**Battle of Bolivar Heights
Oct. 16, 1861**

location: Harpers Ferry, Va. and environs

forces: USA Brigade

commander: Col. Geary

28th P.V. (Maj.

Tyndale)

13th MASS (Maj. Gould)

3rd WISC. (Capt. Whitman)

1st R.I. Batt. (Capt. Tompkins)

9th N.Y. Batt (Lt. Martin)

CSA Brigade commander: Col. Turner Ashby

13th Miss.

19th Miss

8th Va.

Richmond Battery (Capt. Rogers)

CSA Cavalry: 7th Va Cavalry (McDonald's Regt.)

Va. Militia Cavalry

Situation:

Maj. Gen. Banks, com'd'g had ordered troops to cross the Potomac into Va. to seize supplies and perform a reconnaissance in force.

Union forces crossed the Potomac at Harpers Ferry, occupied the town and set off into the countryside seizing supplies.

In the meantime, Rebel forces under Col. Turner Ashby gathered to oppose this incursion and drive the Federal troops back across the Potomac.

The Union troops were reinforced and the surrounding heights were defended and guns emplaced. The object of the mission having been accomplished, the commander, Col. John W. Geary (28th P.V.) decided to withdraw back into Maryland.

On Wed. morning Oct. 16, 1861, Geary's men were deployed as pickets and skirmishers stationed on the Heights (Bolivar) above Harpers Ferry extending from Potomac to the Shenandoah rivers.

Just in the act of withdrawing his troops Geary was attacked by the Confederates under Ashby and driven into the town. Ashby approached from the west in three columns consisting of infantry, cavalry and supported by canon.

Geary quickly arrived upon the ground rallied the troops and brought up the reserves. Shortly, the fighting became general and hot.

The Rebel cavalry acting as an advance guard charged gallantly into the forming lines of Federal infantry, soon followed by their infantry and supported by a number of guns positioned on the surrounding Heights.

Geary detached troops and positioned them at the principle fords to defend them during a crossing. Several Rebel charges upon the Union lines were repulsed with some loss, while the Union forces were subjected to a constant and concentrated fire of the Confederate infantry from above.

The Union forces held their position under this galling fire for several hours, when artillery was ordered up in support of an advance.

Geary pushed his right flank units (28th P.V.) forward which succeeded in turning the Rebel left near the Potomac, then driving them back and secured a portion of the Heights. Simultaneous with the advance was Lt. Martin's battery silencing of the enemy's guns.

Seeing the enemy falling back and a lodgment established, Col. Geary now ordered a general advance along the whole line which was successfully pushed forward until the Heights were secured from river to river.

Fire from infantry and artillery was now directed at the fleeing fugitives who fled precipitously toward Charlestown.

The Union forces were soon reinforced by troops under Maj. Tyndale (28th P.V.) and the "standard of the 28th P.V., the flag of the Union was then unfurled on the soil of Virginia and planted on Bolivar Heights, and under its folds was directed fire against the batteries and forces on Loudoun Heights and soon succeeded in silencing every gun and driving away every Rebel that could be seen." (Geary)

The Union victory was complete. Geary reported the loss of the enemy to be approx. 150 who were carried back in wagons and on horses as rapidly as they fell.

Four prisoners were taken including prominent Rebel sympathizers, among them Rev. Nathaniel Green North who was chaplain of Ashby's command.

Several guns were captured including a 32-lb. Columbiad which was carried across the river and emplaced to be used against its former proprietors.

The Union loss was: 4 killed; 7 wounded; 2 prisoners.

Our prisoners were taken when they mistook the enemy for Mass. men, whose uniforms were identical to the former.

The killed were afterwards charged upon by Rebel cavalry and repeatedly stabbed, stripped of all clothing and equipment and left in perfect nudity on the field. One of the dead was even laid out in the form of a crucifix with hands spread out and cut through the palms with a dull knife.

This inhumane and barbaric treatment incensed the troops exceedingly and bitter retaliation was feared as a future consequence.

Col. Geary complimented all the men of his command for their gallantry as they behaved with the coolness and courage of veterans under the galling fire.

Several visiting civilian dignitaries also took a noble part in the action. The Hon. Daniel McCook, father of Gen. McCook and Mr. Benjamin G. Owen, esq. of St. Louis took up muskets and rendered valuable service as amateur soldiers.

As there was no reason to remain in Harper's Ferry, Geary withdrew his forces after midnight back into Maryland. The operation taking approx. five hours to complete.

The troops were returned to their respective commands.

Col. Ashby, commanding the Confederate forces sent over a flag of truce on the 17th requesting an exchange of prisoners including the Rev. Mr. North. but Geary declined to release him, as certain testimony seemed to indicate that he was indeed a Rebel.

On this same day a few of the enemy dressed as civilians entered Harpers Ferry and burned a mill and caused sundry depredations.

Incidents of the action:

At one point in the action, shells from the 1st R.I. battery were falling among the Union men, who were forced to seek cover.

The Rebel cavalry made at least three charges on the lines of Federal infantry.

The reinforcement of the 28th P.V. under Maj. Tyndale which arrived on the field at the end of the action brought the colors of the 28th with them which were boldly planted in defiance of the enemy.

Geary and his men captured a 321b. Columbiad which was sent back across the Potomac and was used against its former owners.

Some prisoners were taken over confusion in the color of the uniforms, both forces sporting grey and

blue. The 28th P.V. was issued the regulation blue uniform and Hardee hat only after the action at Bolivar.

Some of the Union dead were stripped and left naked on the field and there was evidence of mutilation of the bodies.

Several civilians from Wash. were present on the field, were armed and fought nobly in the battle. There was a flag of truce presented the next day to bury dead and to exchange prisoners.

Many of the men of the 28th P.V. lost their overcoats and blankets in the initial Confederate charge.

In the Rebel cavalry charge the Union pickets were rallied and ordered to the position of guard against cavalry.

17th Annual Reenactment 2006 Neshaminy State Park Bensalem, PA.

Reenactor's Schedule

FRIDAY

**Registration begins from 12 noon until 12 midnight (registration tent).
Registration will commence again at 6AM on Saturday morning at the Cross
roads near Sutlers. All participants MUST register!**

**10 PM Chief of Staffs reception at Refreshment Saloon in Sutler area for
all Union and Confederate field and staff and guests.**

SATURDAY

7 AM Reveille

8 AM ALL VEHICLES OUT OF CAMP and ROADS BLOCKED!

9 AM Police Camps

**Camps open to the public
Commanders' meeting (place TBA)
Company drill**

**10 AM Civilians' meeting (civilian area)
Dress parade Weapons inspection**

10:30 AM Battalion drill (drill field)

11:30 AM artillery demonstration (Union camp)

**12 noon cavalry demonstration (drill
field) dinner (camps)**

12:30 PM Mifflin Guard fife and drum corps concert (crossroads)

12:45PM Side Saddle Riding Demonstration on Drill Field

**1:00 PM civilian activities (civilian area) military
formation for battle**

1:30 PM Battle of Ball's Bluff, (Leesburg, Va.) October 21, 1861

**3:30 PM Hospital scenarios (in camps)
camps closed to public dusk**

**8:30 PM evening entertainment at
Pavilion area - please
bring your lantern!**

11:00 PMtattoo

12 midnight lights out, all quiet

SUNDAY

7:00 AMReveille

**9:00 AMPolice camps
Camps open to Public**

**10:00 AM Non-denominational church
Service (civilian area)**

**10:30AM Camp Inspection (Union
Camp)**

**11:00 AM Dress parade
weapons inspection
Review of Union forces (drill forces)**

**1:00 PMmilitary formation for battle
civilian activities (respective camps)**

1:30 PMBattle of Bolivar Heights, (Harpers Ferry, Va) October 16, 1861

**3:00 PM Honor ceremony (battlefield)
Hospital scenarios (in camps)**

4:00 PMcamps close to public; strike tents

Any changes to the schedule will be posted at the crossroads area. Thank you!

*** Civilian activities will be held in the respective camps; Dance entertainment
will be held at the Pavilion.**

17th Annual Reenactment 2006 Neshaminy State Park Bensalem, PA.

Visitor's Schedule

SATURDAY

9:00 AM Camps and attractions open to public. Company drill in Camps

10:00 AM Dress parade (camps)

10:30 AM Battalion drill (drill-field)

11:30 AM artillery demonstration (Union camp)

**12noon cavalry demonstration (drill field) dinner ("roast beef")
in camps cooking demonstrations**

**12:30 PM Mifflin Guard fife and drum corps concert
(crossroads)**

12:45PM Side Saddle Riding Demonstration – Drill Field

1:00PM civilian activities (civilian area) military forms for battle

**1:30 PM Battle of (reenactors only) Battle of Ball's Bluff, (Leesburg, Va.) October 21,
1861**

2:30 PM public portion of battle River Landing area

3:30 PM Hospital scenes in camps: dusk camps closed to public

SUNDAY 9:00 AM camps and

attractions open to public

**10:00AM Non-Denominational period Church service
(civilian area)**

11:00 AM Dress parade (camps); Review of Union forces (drill field)

12 noon dinner in camps (cooking demonstrations)

1:30 PM Battle of Bolivar Heights, Oct. 16, 1861 (reenactors portion)

**2:30 PM public portion of battle River
Landing area**

3:15 PM Battle ends, Honor ceremony 3:30

PM hospital scenes in camps

**4:00 PM camps close to public
reenactment ends.**

- **Any changes to schedule will be posted at the cross roads near the sutlers' area. * civilian activities will be held in the respective camps; Dance entertainment will be held at the Pavilion.**

THE CIVIL WAR REENACTORS LIAISON COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE STANDARDS

1. AGE:

13 - Functional musician; 16 – Combatant; No one under 13 allowed on the field

2. Period Footwear *MANDATORY!*

3. EYE WEAR

Contact lenses preferred

Glasses must be correct for the period

4. CANTEEN *MANDATORY!*

5. NO anachronisms on the person; including but not limited to: wristwatches, earrings, jewelry (except wedding bands), cigarettes, lighters, bandanas

6. INFANTRY WEAPONS 3 banders preferred, correct 2 banders are allowed but are discouraged

NO non-period

weapons

NO civilian

weapons

Sidearms carried by officers and senior battalion NCO's (sgt major, ordinance sgt, etc) only

7. RAMRODS permitted but not drawn

8. BAYONETS; not fixed on the field

scabbards must have tips

(unbroken) on the field belt

knives are discouraged and will

not be drawn NO rubber knives

9. CHARGES limited to maximum load of:

54-58 cal. - 70 grains

69 cal. - 80 grains

weapons should be slightly elevated when firing, No direct fire

10. NO weapons discharged within 25 yards

(rule of "thumb"; holding your arm extended and your thumb upright, a man at 25 yards will equal the height of your thumb, at 50 yards a man will be 1/2

- thumb height).
11. **NO live ammunition at a reenactment site for any reason
NO tampions beyond point of departure to battlefield**
 12. **NO fireworks or pyrotechnics**
 13. **NO attempt to take an enemy flag unless
previously arranged**
 14. **NO unauthorized hand-to-hand combat**
 14. **FOULED MUSKETS to be taken *a minimum* of 20 paces behind the line of *file closers* under supervision of sgt/armorer to clear
ONLY the sgt/armorer allowed to draw rammer if necessary
if unable to clear, the soldier must take a hit**
 15. **NO mounted personnel to ride through infantry camps**
 16. **NO tent flies in company streets**
 17. **Non-authentic visitors are encouraged to dress authentically, otherwise
expected to depart at end of spectator day and not return until spectator
hours recommence.**
 18. **NO visible anachronisms in camp at any time. Including but not limited to:
coolers, modern cans/bottles, cigarettes, bags of chips, bread in plastic bags,
20th century clothing (shorts, T-shirts, etc.)**
 19. **NO pets**
 20. **RANK; officers are expected to bring troops or to have been assigned to an
appropriate staff position**
 21. **HATS NO unblocked hat blanks, hats must be
properly blocked with sweatband appropriate
crown & brim ribbons (NO hat cords or brass)**
 22. **Shirts, jackets and trousers all must be of 19th century cut and tailoring and
of correct cloth TROUSERS should be cut full, waistband covering navel
and raising sharply from side seam to center rear
JACKETS should be of a documented pattern following 19th century cut
Too many articles of clothing are available from sutlers that are cut on 20th
century styles**

ADDITIONAL EVENT REGULATIONS:

- ▶ **For cavalry—a current Coggins Test is required; a health certificate is recommended. Event coordinators reserve the right to exclude unfit horses.**
- ▶ **No individual unit or regimental solicitation for recruitment.**
- ▶ **No unauthorized solicitation for raffles or fund-raising.**
- ▶ **No hoarding of Wood! Event coordinators reserve the right to redistribute wood supplies.**
- ▶ **Water in water buffaloes strictly for drinking. Hoses are available at the restrooms.**
- ▶ **All units will be responsible to police their own areas/company streets by placing trash at the end of company streets at the close of camp Saturday evening and Sunday after the battle. Also gather extra straw and wood into one pile at the end of the event. This is a state park—leave it looking better than when you arrived. Thank you.**