The Messy Birth of The “Stonewall Brigade” with Dennis Frye

by Jim Surkamp on July 6, 2011 in Jefferson County

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28: Many of these militia men that would start to stream into Harper’s Ferry in the early days of the war, right after April the 18th, right after Virginia occupied fully Harper’s Ferry, many of these men had practiced as militia men, had drilled as militia men, but certainly had never been soldiers before, certainly never soldiers in battle. And so, hundreds, then thousands,
ultimately up to 8,000 men, start to descend on Harper’s Ferry in the opening weeks of the war. Now remember the population of Harper’s Ferry, Bolivar, and Virginius Island all combined was only about 2,900 citizens. And so, the town’s population almost triples within a month.

Initially these soldiers were commanded by Virginia militia generals with very gaudy uniforms, very colorful, and they brought with them their big staffs and they had with them lots of whiskey, and whiskey became the principal liquid nourishment of these soldiers... It really was a circus...

He (Henry Kyd Douglas) would report: ‘Nothing was serious yet, everything was a joke...’ Well, this would soon end, this joke. A serious face and a serious person would soon arrive. And his name is Jackson. Thomas Jonathan Jackson...

Virginia needed someone who had experience to command at Harper’s Ferry to take these citizen soldiers and to make them real battle-hardened
soldiers. Jackson himself was battle-hardened. Jackson himself was a graduate of West Point. Jackson had fought in Mexico and had fought with great bravery...

3:34 But when Virginia seceded, Jackson, who himself was opposed to secession, just like Robert E. Lee, Jackson would cast his future with his home state... And his very first assignment of the Civil War would be to take command at Harper’s Ferry...

To continue, see the video, Total Running Time (TRT): 4:15

THOMAS JONATHAN JACKSON – Harper’s Ferry, VA.

Thomas Jackson wrote his wife Anna, whom he often endearingly called ‘esposita’:

“Little one,
You must not expect to hear from me very often, as I expect to have more work than I have ever had in the same length of time before; but don’t be concerned about your husband, for our kind Heavenly Father will give every needful aid.”

What follows are accounts of young men in the area who went to Harper’s Ferry to become soldiers, to become cooks, or were alarmed and already lived there:
DAVID HUMPHREYS – Charles Town, VA.

“When the call came in April, 1861, for the men of Virginia to report at Harper’s Ferry to join the army gathering there, the volunteer company known as ‘The Botts Greys,’ of Charles Town, in the Valley of Virginia, was among the first to report. The company, like many others, was composed of men who were all well-to-do, and many of them wealthy. They naturally thought to take into army life as many comforts as possible. Two wagons were built adapted to carry the belongings of the members, in addition to such transportation as the Quartermaster might furnish. They were up-to-date, and contained arrangements for each mess to have its own chest, cots, utensils and a trunk for each man. Quite a number of servants to black boots, attend to the washing and cooking, were taken along. We were all proud of our equipment, and expected to do ‘genteel fighting’ only..."

“General Jackson considered a gum cloth, a blanket, a tooth-brush and forty rounds of cartridges as the full equipment for a gentleman soldier.”

HENRY KYD DOUGLAS – Shepherdstown, VA

“In a week, I was back on the Potomac. When I found my mother sewing on heavy shirts – with a heart doubtless heavier than I knew – I suspected for what and whom they were being made. In a few days, I was at Harper’s Ferry, a private in the Shepherdstown Company, Company B, Second Virginia Infantry. Here I had all the experiences of one in the awkward squad in drill, duty, and discipline.

“My first night duty as sentinel was on the canal path along the Potomac; it was a lonely ‘beat’ and gave me little suggestion of the future. Colonel Thomas Jonathan Jackson was in command of the post for about a month after the 17th of April. Then General Joseph E. Johnston arrived and Jackson was placed over four Virginia Regiments, afterwards five..."
arrived and Jackson was placed over four Virginia Regiments, afterwards five – the Second, Fourth, Fifth, Twenty-seventh and Thirty-third – and began to mold them into that brigade which made for themselves and him the name of ‘Stonewall’ . . .

“ Mothers and sisters and other dear girls came constantly to Harper’s Ferry and there was little difficulty in seeing them. Nothing was serious yet; everything much like a joke. When George Flagg, cleaning barracks, was seen carrying two buckets of scrubblings across the grounds and was guyed for carrying slops, he responded, ‘Slops! This is not slops. It is patriotism!’ This was but as ample of the lightheartedness with which all duty was done.

ROGER PRESTON CHEW – Charles Town, VA.

MILTON ROUSS – Charles Town, VA.

“Local Charles Town boys Milton Rouss and Roger Preston Chew came along with their former VMI professor to Harper’s Ferry. Thinking Jackson was still the soft touch professor who they fired chalk to his turned back, both snuck out one night. Now Colonel Jackson ordered them to his tent: “Young gentleman you have been guilty of a great breach of military discipline. If you were enlisted I would have had you shot. As it is, you have rendered your services of no value to me. Report at once back to the Superintendent of VMI.” SOURCE: Adams, Julia D. (1974) “Chews’ Flying Battery.” Magazine of the Jefferson County Historical Society. Vol. XL. Print.
EDWIN GRAY LEE – Shepherdstown, VA

GEORGE RUST BEDINGER – Shepherdstown, VA

Edwin Grey Lee and his cousin, George Rust Bedinger, left amid fanfare to enlist at Harper’s Ferry, leaving from the portico of the old ancestral home, Bedford, once overlooking today’s Flowing Springs Road in Shepherdstown. The home of his parents, Edmund Jennings and Henrietta Bedinger Lee, had burned to the ground in 1856 by a wind-whipped chimney fire.

Young Lee and Bedinger had recently paraded in the fancy uniforms of the town militia, the Hamtramck Guards, as reported in “The Shepherdstown Register:"

“On Washington’s Birthday the Shepherdstown Hamtramck Guards appeared for the first time in their new uniforms of gray, trimmed with yellow lace and black shank. White epaulettes gleamed on their shoulders, and their natty blue caps were crested with blue-tipped white plumes. Knapsacks were strapped to their backs, and their new arms were the regular percussion muskets with spring bayonets, manufactured at Harpers Ferry. These guns were said to be equal, perhaps superior, to the Minie musket.” “The Register” for March 30, 1861, claimed that the Shepherdstown outfit “presented as fine and handsome appearance as any company in the State, and in drilling they cannot be surpassed.”

According to Author Alexandra Lee Levin: “‘There was a tearful scene at Bedford when Edwin and his cousin, George Bedinger, took leave of the women folk. George had hurried home from the University of Virginia to volunteer his services. Edwin looked resplendent in the new uniform which the Hamtramck Guards had worn for the first time on Washington’s Birthday."
The soldier lads appeared proud and assured as they moved off to the martial strains of Criswell’s cornet band. Edwin seemed every inch a hero in the eyes of his brothers, Edmund and Harry, who marched alongside for a short distance.’ At Harper’s Ferry the Hamtramck Guards unit became Company B, Second Virginia Infantry, with Lieutenant Edwin Gray Lee as adjutant of the regiment. George Bedinger and Henry Kyd Douglas were privates in the regiment.”

Ms. Levin continues: “Colonel Thomas J. Jackson, then practically unknown, had been sent to Harper’s Ferry as commanding officer at Camp Lee when Edwin’s wife, Sue, wrote to her parents from Bedford: ‘I hear from Mr. Lee every day or two. He is well and in good spirits. They are all rejoicing in the decapitation of the Militia officers, and seem much pleased at having the commanding officer at the Post a man of as much practical experience as . . . Jackson. The change occasioned some confusion and extra work, but he expected they would all get quiet again in a few days.’

“Sue worried about Edwin’s precarious health. Three weeks later she wrote to her father: ‘We got letters from Camp Lee. They had no shelter from the rain but the rude huts they put up, which did not keep it out. Some were sick, but Edwin well so far, thank God. They were marching and building all Sunday.’ Sue was worried also by the fact that the folks living around Camp Lee were ‘bitterly hostile’ to the soldiers. ”Tis a shame in Virginia,’ she commented.” (Ms. Levin’s SOURCE: Letters dated May 3, 1861 and May 23, 1861, Wm. N. Pendleton Papers, University of North Carolina Library).

Levin continues: “The County Court of Jefferson sent out a call to the women of the county to volunteer to make tents for the soldiers then housed in rude huts at Harper’s Ferry. Henrietta Lee and her niece Diddie Bedinger, along with other Shepherdstown women, were hard at work sewing tents and shirts for the men at camp. ‘Your Papa took Virginia and me up to see them last week,’ Mrs. Lee wrote to her daughter, Ida Rust. ‘We met with our usual luck: broke down twice, and after various delays and accidents got there at half-past three, stayed half an hour, and jolted home, which we reached at ten o’clock at night, being eleven hours in the spring wagon.’ One reason for their delay was that their horse, Jimminy-Crimminy, had become skittish and refused to cross a small stream as they neared the noisy encampment. They
were therefore compelled to borrow another horse to get them home.

“Mrs. Lee had news concerning Ida’s Aunt Susan Cornwall in Connecticut: ‘I am sorry to say she has joined her voice in the baying and barking of the Northern bloodhounds, and seems crazy upon the subject of Flag, Union, and Constitution,’ she wrote to Ida. ‘Oh, at times I am so sick of noise and wrangling and contest that I long for the wings of a dove to flee away.’ She added that she hoped ‘a good Providence’ would station Edwin where there would be no fighting.” (Ms. Levin’s SOURCE: Letters from Bedford, June 1, 1861, Goldsborough Collection).

JOHN WESLEY SEIBERT – Shepherdstown, VA

Black Man, Cook for Company B throughout the war. Lived when he was growing up as property on the land of Mrs. Betsy Morgan outside Shepherdstown, near the Lees. He was the town barber after the War for many years. At his funeral in 1903, a dozen surviving members of Company B., marched with armbands behind the wagon taking his body to his burial place. SOURCE: “The Shepherdstown Register,” May 7, 1903.
Edwin Lee wrote that a “Wesley” was one of three who prepared meals for the officers with Jackson in the early days, along with men named “Tony,” “Frank,” and “Bob.” Lee wrote his wife: “In camp our eating is pretty good, but on the march it is pretty thunderin’ bad.”

WILLIAM F. LEE – Shepherdstown, VA.

Col. Jackson may well have asked Lee, a student at VMI when Jackson taught there, to come to Harper’s Ferry to be one of two men he asked to lead in drills.

Jackson was likely present when 20-year old Lee delivered a graduation address on July 4, 1853 at the Virginia Military Institute. His father’s death, when he was five, and the recent death of the father of his future wife, Lily Parran, might have quickened Lee’s senses: “When I look around the happy faces of the motley throng assembled here tonight and reflect those bright eyes may on tomorrow’s dawn grow dim with tears; when I meet the smiles of youthful manhood, the thoughtful glance of matured intellect, or the searching gaze of venerated old age and I consider that disappointment, sorrow and misfortune may weave around them each and all, I am painfully reminded that change is written upon us all...”
Commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant, Lee and his wife, were stationed at Jefferson Barracks, near St. Louis and they became close friends with another young officer J. E. B. Stuart and his wife, Laura. A visiting group of admirers presented Stuart with a set of silver spurs that he enigmatically turned and gave to his friend, Lt. Lee. When hostilities broke out back east, a hot exchange of words had Lee placed under house-arrest after which he hurried back to Shepherdstown. He resigned his commission April 27, 1861 – the same day Jackson was given the command in Harper’s Ferry. Jackson bumped Lee’s rank considerably up to acting Lt. Col. in the 33rd Virginia Infantry, being organized at Harper’s Ferry.

JOHN N. OPIE – Of late, Kabletown, VA.
NOTE: This bridge will be destroyed in mid-June, 1861-ED.

“Harper’s Ferry.

“This beautiful town . . . was first thought to be a point of great strategic importance, but one can readily see that, with Bolivar Heights commanding the town, Loudoun Heights overlooking Bolivar, and Maryland Heights overlooking and commanding the whole, nothing less than an immense army could occupy and hold the position. Then, again, the position could be easily flanked and passed, either on the east, through Loudoun County, lower down the Potomac, or on the west, higher up that river, by way of Shepherdstown or Williamsport; therefore it was not the key to either Maryland or Virginia, as was frequently demonstrated during the course of after events. It was here that the first Virginian army, which was composed of volunteer militia, assembled.

“When we reached the place, where a Government armory and arsenal were located, we found that the small Union force had fled, first setting fire to the public buildings. We succeeded, however, in saving most of the machinery and some hundred stand of muskets.

“Our stay here was spent in organizing and drilling. I was detailed to assist Maj. John A. Harman, afterwards Jackson’s quartermaster, my duty being to quarter the troops as they arrived. The Major at first gave me the countersign every evening, until, finally, he remarked to me, ‘Your father has asked me not to give you the countersign.’ I replied that, being an enlisted man, I was
no longer under his authority. I had, that evening, an engagement, and must have the countersign, so I got my musket; and buckled on my belt, determined not to be circumvented. I took post at the mouth of an alley, and marched up and down as a sentinel, until, finally, hearing some one advancing, I brought my gun to a charge and gave the usual command, ‘Halt! Who comes there?’ ‘Friend with the countersign.’ ‘Advance, friend, and give the countersign.’ The officer advanced and gave me the countersign, when, returning to the office and divesting myself of gun and accoutrements, I pursued the even tenor of my way. This I continued to do, for several nights, until, at last, one night I heard some one approach, and, upon going through the usual ceremony, I found that I had halted the Major himself, who, recognizing me, exclaimed, ‘You little rascal!’ After this he always gave me the countersign. This mode of procuring the countersign I used during the whole war, together with the following plan: When there was a cordon of sentinels around the camp, and there was no possibility of making a new post, I wedged in between two sentinels and walked the beat until I met one, when, having forgotten the countersign, I would ask him for it. He, supposing I was a sentinel, invariably gave it to me.

“While we were at Harper’s Ferry many leading citizens of Maryland, among them a delegation of the Maryland Legislature, visited us and entreated us to enter that State, but they were entirely disregarded by our authorities.

“We had many false alarms, as our officers supposed that the enemy would enter the town on trains and disembark at the depot.

“At last Gen. T. J. Jackson, afterwards known as ‘Stonewall’ Jackson, arrived, took command, and soon produced order out of chaos. Finding that there were great quantities of liquor in the town, he ordered it to be poured out. The barrels were brought forth, the heads knocked in, and the contents poured into the gutter; but the men dipped it up in buckets, and there was a sound of revelry by night. Finally, he ordered the whiskey to be poured into the Potomac river; but still the soldiers, particularly the Kentuckians, gathered round, with buckets tied to the ends of ropes, and caught great quantities of the disturbing element as it poured into the waters below.

“I was very much astonished that the military authorities permitted thousands of cars loaded with live stock, breadstuff and bacon to pass through from the
of cars loaded with live stock, breadstuff and bacon to pass through from the fertile fields of the West to our Northern enemies.”

JOHN IMBODEN – Harper’s Ferry, VA.

“Within a week about thirteen hundred Virginia volunteers had assembled there. As these companies were, in fact, a part of the State militia, they were legally under command of the three brigadiers and one major-general of militia, who had authority over this, that, or the other organization. These generals surrounded themselves with a numerous staff, material for which was abundant in the rank and file of the volunteers; for instance, in my battery there were at least a dozen college graduates of and below the grade of corporal. Every fair afternoon the official display in Harper’s Ferry of ‘fuss and feathers’ would have done no discredit to the Champs Elysees.

“One afternoon, six or eight days after our occupation, General Harper sent for me, as the senior artillery officer (we then had three batteries, but all without horses), to say he had been told that a number of trains on the Baltimore and Ohio railroad would try to pass us in the night, transporting troops from the West to Washington, and that he had decided to prevent them at the risk of bringing on a battle. He ordered the posting of guns so as to command the road for half a mile or more, all to be accurately trained on the track by the light of day, and ready to be discharged at any moment. Infantry companies were stationed to fire into the trains, if the artillery failed. On the other hand, the trains were to have the right of way, and the gunners were not allowed to fire without express order in case of necessity.
failed to stop them. Pickets were posted out two or three miles, with orders to fire signal-guns as soon as the first troop-laden train should pass.

"About 1 o’clock at night we heard the rumbling of an approaching train. The long roll was beat; the men assembled at their assigned positions and in silence awaited the sound of the signal-guns. A nervous cavalryman was the vedette. As the train passed him (it was the regular mail) he thought he saw soldiers in it, and fired. Pop! pop! pop! came down the road from successive sentries. Primers were inserted and lanyards held taut, to be pulled when the engine should turn a certain point four hundred yards distant from the battery.

"By great good luck Colonel William S. H. Baylor, commanding the 5th Virginia regiment, was with some of his men stationed a little beyond the point, and, seeing no troops aboard the train, signaled it to stop. It did so, not one hundred yards beyond where the artillery would have opened on it. When the first excitement was over, he demanded of the conductor what troops, if any, were on board, and was told there was ‘one old fellow in uniform asleep on the mail-bags in the first car.’ Entering that car with a file of soldiers, he secured the third prisoner of war taken in Virginia.

"It proved to be Brigadier-General W. S. Harney, of the United States army, on his way from the West to Washington, to resign his commission and go to Europe rather than engage in a fratricidal war. He surrendered with a pleasant remark, and was taken to General Harper’s headquarters, where he spent the night. On his assurance that he knew of no troops coming from the West, Harper ordered us all to quarters. Next morning General Harney was paroled to report in Richmond, and was escorted to a train about to leave for Winchester. He was a fine-looking old soldier, and as he walked down the street to the depot he saw all our forces except the cavalry. He was accompanied socially by two or three of our
generals and a swarm of staff-officers.

“He cast his glance over the few hundred men in sight, and turning to General Harper, I heard him inquire, with a merry twinkle in his eye, ‘Where is your encamped, general?’ Harper’s face crimsoned as he replied, ‘Excuse me from giving information.’ Harney smiled, and said politely, ‘Pardon me for asking an improper question, but I had forgotten I was a prisoner.’

“He went on to Richmond, was treated with marked courtesy, and in a day or two proceeded to Washington. In a few days our forces began to increase by the arrival of fresh volunteer companies. Being only a captain, I was kept very busy in trying to get my battery into the best condition. We had no caissons and but insufficient harness. For the latter I sent to Baltimore, purchasing on my private credit. In the same way I ordered from Richmond red flannel shirts and other clothing for all my men, our uniforms being too fine for camp life. The governor subsequently ordered these bills to be paid by the State treasurer. We found at the armory a large number of very strong horse-carts.

“In my battery were thirty or more excellent young mechanics. By using the wheels and axles of the carts they soon constructed good caissons, which served us till after the first battle of Bull Run. We had no telegraph line to Richmond except via Washington, and the time of communication by mail was two days. General Harper found it so difficult to obtain needed munitions and supplies, that about the last of April he decided to send me to the governor, who was my intimate friend, with a requisition for all we needed, and verbal instructions to make to him a full statement of our necessitous and defenseless condition, in case General Robert Patterson, who was reported with a Federal force at Chambersburg, should move against us. When I arrived in Richmond, General Robert E. Lee had been placed in command of all the Virginia forces by the governor, and by an ordinance every militia officer in the State above the rank of captain had been decapitated, and the governor and his military council had been authorized to fill vacancies thus created.
“This was a disastrous blow to ‘the pomp and circumstance of glorious war’ at Harper’s Ferry. Militia generals and the brilliant ‘staff’ were stricken down, and their functions devolved, according to Governor Letcher’s order of April 27th, upon Thomas J. Jackson, colonel commandant, and James W. Massie, major and assistant adjutant-general, who arrived during the first week of May.

“This was ‘Stonewall’ Jackson’s first appearance on the theater of the war. I spent one day and night in Richmond, and then returned to camp, arriving about 2 PM.

“What a revolution three or four days had wrought! I could scarcely realize the change.

“The militia generals were all gone, and the staff had vanished. The commanding colonel and his adjutant had arrived, and were occupying a small room in the little wayside hotel near the railroad bridge. Knowing them both, I immediately sought an interview, and delivered a letter and some papers I had brought from General Lee. Jackson and his adjutant were at a little pine table figuring upon the rolls of the troops present. They were dressed in well-worn, dingy uniforms of professors in the Virginia Military Institute, where both had recently occupied chairs. Colonel Jackson had issued and sent to the camps a short, simple order assuming the command, but had had no intercourse with the troops. The deposed officers had nearly all left for home or for Richmond in a high state of indignation.

“After an interview of perhaps a half hour I proceeded to my camp on the hill, and found the men of the 5th Virginia regiment, from my own county, in assembly, and greatly excited. They were deeply attached to their field officers, and regarded the ordinance of the convention as an outrage on freemen and volunteers, and were discussing the propriety of passing denunciatory resolutions. On seeing me they called for a speech. As I did not
belong to the regiment, I declined to say anything, but ordered the men of the Staunton Artillery to fall into line.

“Then I briefly told them that we were required to muster into service either for twelve months or during the war, at our option, and urged them to go in for the full period of the war, as such action would be most creditable to them, and a good example to others. They unanimously shouted, ‘For the war! For the war!’ Before they were dismissed the ceremony of mustering in was completed, and I proudly took the roll down to Colonel Jackson with the remark, ‘There, colonel, is the roll of your first company mustered in for the war.’ He looked it over, and, rising, shook my hand, saying, ‘Thank you, captain thank you; and please thank your men for me.’ He had heard that there was dissatisfaction in the camps, and asked me to act as mustering officer for two other artillery companies present. Before sunset the rolls were returned. This prompt action of the batteries was emulated the next day by the other troops, and all were mustered in.

“...The presence of a mastermind was visible in the changed condition of the camp. Perfect order reigned everywhere. Instruction in the details of military duties occupied Jackson’s whole time. He urged the officers to call upon him for information about even the minutest details of duty, often remarking that it was no discredit to a civilian to be ignorant of military matters. He was a rigid disciplinarian, and yet as gentle and kind as a woman. He was the easiest man in our army to get along with pleasantly so long as one did his duty, but as inexorable as fate in exacting the performance of it; yet he would overlook serious faults if he saw they were the result of ignorance, and would instruct the offender in a kindly way. He was as courteous to the humblest private who sought an interview for any purpose as to the highest officer in his command. He despised superciliousness and self-assertion, and nothing angered him so quickly as to see an officer wound the feelings of those under him by irony or sarcasm.”

THOMAS J. JACKSON – Harper’s Ferry Commander

On May 3rd, 18961, Jackson wrote his wife, Anna, from Harper’s Ferry:

“I feel better this morning than I have for some time. …
Those Who Became “The Stonewall Brigade” – Dennis Frye TRT: 5:39

:00 . . .”Stonewall” Jackson will become the famous “Stonewall” Jackson on July 21, 1861, because the men in his ranks will stand on Henry Hill and stand there like a stone wall. “There stands Jackson like a stone wall” would declare General Bee.

:58 But who were these men that enabled “Stonewall” Jackson to earn that nickname? . . . Many of these men were from the lower Shenandoah Valley. These were men from Jefferson County, Berkeley County, Clarke County, and Frederick County, Virginia. These men . . . were many of the same men who arrived at Harper’s Ferry that third week of April right after the armory and arsenal had been seized, arrived there, drilled there, were trained there by Thomas Jonathan Jackson . . . so there was a bond between Jackson and the local boys . . .

2:05 Who comprised the 2nd Virginia Infantry?
The First Virginia Brigade was comprised of five regiments. These five regiments totaled a little under three thousand men. And one of those regiments, known as the 2nd Virginia Regiment, was principally the lower Shenandoah Valley regiment. And in the 2nd Virginia Infantry were ten companies of men. Now a company at full strength was supposed to be about a hundred men. Most of the companies had about seventy to eighty men. The regiment itself may have been six hundred to eight hundred men, even at the beginning of the war.

So here was the composition of the 2nd Virginia Regiment. Company A came from Charles Town and was commanded by Captain John W. Rowan. Company B came from Shepherdstown, known as the “Hamtramck Guard,” and they were commanded by Capt. Vincent Butler. Company C came out of Clarke County and they were known as the “Nelson Rifles” and were commanded by Capt. William Nelson. Company D came from Martinsburg from Berkeley County, commanded by Capt. John Quincy Adams Nadenbousch. Company E came out of Berkeley County and they were known as the “Hedgesville Riflemen” and they were commanded by Capt. Raleigh Colston. Company F, now this is our Frederick County company, were known as the “Winchester Riflemen” and they were commanded by Capt. William Clark, Jr. Company G – we come back to Jefferson County – was known as the “Botts Greys,” named after Lawson Botts of Charles Town. Company H, the “Letcher Riflemen,” named after the Governor of Virginia. They come out of Duffields – tiny little Duffields – here in Jefferson County. And they will be commanded by Capt. James H. L. Hunter. Then we go back to Clarke County (Company I-ED), the “Clarke Rifles,” they come out of the Berryville area and they will be commanded by Capt. Strother H. Bowen. And then finally the final company, the tenth company of the 2nd Infantry, Company K, was known as the “Floyd Guard,” named after former Secretary of War, John B. Floyd, and they were based out of Harper’s Ferry. Many of the armourers joined this company in response to John Brown and they were commanded by the mayor of Harper’s Ferry, George W. Chambers. So ten companies from the four lower Shenendoah Valley counties, all totaled about 800 men who are soon to do battle at Henry Hill and stand like a Stone Wall.

To continue, see the video, Total Running Time (TRT): 5:39
The 2nd Virginia Infantry was not a brand new organization in April, May, and June of 1861. Not new at all. Every company in the 2nd Virginia – all ten companies – had been organized as the Virginia militia companies prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. Now the oldest – the company that had been in existence the longest was Company A, the Charles Town Company that Capt. Rowan was in command of. This company, the “Jefferson Guard,” had been organized in 1858...

Most of the rest of the companies came into existence as a result of the John Brown Raid. You need to remember that Virginians considered John Brown...as an invader and they expected more invasions by more people like John Brown.

These were not just your regular ‘cornstalk and feather-bed’ militia...They would meet weekly, in their companies. They would come into formation in the town square...

We had these different varieties of uniforms...

Who led this regiment...The 2nd Infantry was led by men who had...
military experience. As an example, the Colonel – Colonel of the regiment – James Walkenshaw Allen... thirty-one years old in 1861, a graduate of the Virginia Military Institute... he later became a professor who taught at VMI, he taught with Jackson...

4:37 You can see the leadership of this regiment not only had the technical learned experience that they received from the benefit through the Virginia Military Institute, but many of these men... have already experienced battle themselves...

To continue, see the video, Total Running Time (TRT): 5:36

Esprit de Corps of the 2nd Virginia – May, 1861 – Dennis Frye

:00 When the 2nd Virginia came together in April-May of 1861, many of these men didn’t know each other. Now, they knew other within their companies... But by June and July of 1861, that had changed...

To continue, see the video, Total Running Time (TRT): 4:23

JOSEPH BARRY – resident of Harper’s Ferry

“Harper’s Ferry was occupied for nearly two months by the confederates. The fine machinery at the workshops was taken down and transported to Fayetteville, North Carolina, where the rebels had established an armory. While the place was held by the insurgents it presented a scene, novel at the
While the place was held by the insurgents it presented a scene, novel at the time, but very familiar during the remainder of the war.

“One night great excitement was caused by the capture of General Harney of the United States army, who was a passenger on board of one of the trains en route for Washington City from Saint Louis. The general was sent a prisoner to Richmond, but his advanced years rendering it improbable that he could do much good or harm to either side, he was soon released, and he was not again heard from ’till the close of the war. While a prisoner on the road from Harper’s Ferry to Charlestown, he and his guards came up to a squad of farmers who, on their plough horses, were learning the cavalry drill. The officer who was instructing them sat in a buggy, either because he could not procure a decent horse or on account of illness. The sight furnished the old veteran with infinite amusement and, turning to his guards, he said that in all his army experience of over-half a century and, in all he had studied of warfare, he had never before seen or heard of a cavalry officer commanding his troop from a buggy seat, and his fat sides fairly shook with laughter at the oddity of the conceit. The sarcasm was felt by the guards, and they were forced to admit that this innovation on cavalry methods was hardly an improvement…

“All the government property at the place was seized and many families who were renting houses from the government were obliged to vacate their homes at great inconvenience and procure shelter wherever they could.

“Guards were posted along the streets at very short intervals and these, like all young soldiers, were extremely zealous and exacting. Of course, regular business was entirely destroyed, but new branches of industry of the humblest and, in some cases, of the most disreputable kind sprang into existence. The baking of pies and the smuggling of whiskey were the principal employments of those who felt the need of some kind of work, and these trades continued to flourish at the place all through the war to the probable detriment to the stomachs and the certain damage to the morals of the consumers. The whiskey business was exceedingly profitable and it was embraced by all who were willing to run the risks attending it (for it was strictly interdicted by the military commanders of both sides) and who were regardless of the disgraceful nature of the employment.
Another trade soon sprang up — that of the spy. Malicious and officious people — many of whom are to be found in all communities — stuffed the ears of the hot-headed southern men with tales about sneaking abolitionists, black republicans, unconditional union men. &c, and private enmity had an excellent opportunity for gratification, of which villains did not hesitate to avail themselves. Many quiet, inoffensive citizens were dragged from their homes and confined in filthy guard houses, a prey to vermin and objects of insult to the rabble that guarded them. Large histories could be written on the sufferings of individuals during this period and our proposed limits would not contain the hundredth part of them.

Sometimes a false alarm about advancing ‘Yankees’ would set the soldiers on the qui vive and, of course, the citizens were on such occasions thrown into a state of the utmost terror. Sometimes, also, the officers would start or encourage the circulation of these reports in order to test the mettle of their men and several times were lines of battle formed in and around the town. On one occasion a terrible hail storm came up which, of itself, is worthy of a place in the annals of the town. In the midst of descending cakes of ice, the 2nd Virginia regiment — raised mostly in Jefferson county — was ordered to march to Shepherdstown to repel an imaginary invasion. They obeyed with alacrity and returned, if not war-worn, certainly storm-pelted and weather-beaten, as their bleeding faces and torn and soaked uniforms amply proved.

The confederates exercised control over the Baltimore and Ohio railroad and also the Winchester and Potomac railroad, the latter being entirely within the territory of Virginia, and, whenever a passenger train stopped at the station, the travelers were scrutinized and, if a man of any prominence who was attached to the old government was recognized among them, he was greeted with groans, hisses and threats of lynching.

On one occasion the Hon. Henry Hoffman, of Cumberland, who, even then, was regarded as an ultra-Republican, was a passenger and, when the train stopped at Harper’s Ferry, the fact of his presence was made known to the crowds of soldiers on the platform of the depot by a fellow passenger who evidently entertained some private malice against Mr. Hoffman. The informer stood on the platform of one of the cars and, with wild gestures and foaming mouth, denounced Mr. Hoffman in the fiercest manner and, no doubt, the life
of the latter would have been sacrificed had not some of the more cool-headed among the confederate officers present poured oil on the troubled waters until the starting of the train. One evening the mail train was detained and the mail bags were taken away from the government agent by an armed posse. The letters were sent to headquarters and many of the townspeople to whom friends in the north and west had written freely denouncing secession, were put under arrest and some were in imminent danger of being subjected to the utmost rigor of military law.

“Mr. William McCoy, of Bolivar, an aged, infirm man and one of irreproachable character, was handled very roughly on this occasion. He was arrested on some charge founded on evidence obtained from the plundered mail bags and he was kept for several days in close confinement. The military authorities in the meantime expressed their intention of making him a signal example of vengeance. Whether they really meant to go to extremes with him or not is uncertain, but there is no doubt that the ill usage he received from them hastened his death. With the utmost difficulty some powerful friends succeeded in obtaining for him a commutation of the proposed punishment, and he was allowed very grudgingly to move with his family to Ohio, on condition that he should never return. Hastily picking up a few necessaries, he started on the first train going west for the place of his exile, glad enough to escape with his life, even at the sacrifice of his valuable property in Bolivar.

“The confederate soldiers immediately destroyed, the neat fence around his residence and tilled up the post holes, in order, as they said, to give him as much trouble as possible in case he was enabled at any time to return. The house itself being necessary to them as barracks, was spared unwillingly. The poor old man died in a short time after and, no doubt, he now enjoys all the happiness promised to those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake. It is true that, even in the peaceful realms to which poor “Uncle Billy” has ascended there was once a rebellion, but there never will be another in that happy land and, if there should be, he need not fear any worse treatment than he received on earth from the chivalry of his native south.

“Mr. Abraham H. Herr, proprietor of the Island of Virginius, was arrested, like Mr. McCoy, on some charge founded on his intercepted correspondence. He was taken to Richmond, but was released soon after on parole, as is
supposed. He was a native of Pennsylvania and, although he had voted with the south to ratify the ordinance of secession passed by the Virginia convention, he lay under suspicion of unfriendly thoughts towards the south, and it will appear hereafter that he suffered for his supposed attachment to the union, a heavy loss in property, besides the deprivation of liberty above noted.

Dennis Frye’s Personal Interest in the 2nd Virginia Infantry

:00 Now the 2nd Virginia Infantry has special interest to me because I’m a local boy...

Mr. Frye discusses 30 years encompassing his education, influences, his writings of regimental histories, his experiences with Harold Howard, and his compilation of rosters of the 2nd Virginia and the 12th Virginia Cavalry, that serve as a basis for the content on this website.-ED.

References:


Barry, Joseph. (1907). “The Strange Story of Harper’s Ferry: with legends of...


Wesley Seibert Answers the Last Call. “The Shepherdstown Register.” May 7, 1903.

Battle of First Manassas, Va. July 21, 1861. (MAP) “Civil War Trust”


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Videos:


Frye, Dennis. “General Background to the 2nd Virginia.” American Military University Civil War Scholars. 1 July 2011 Web. 1 July 2011.

Flickr Set:

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Collection of Jim Surkamp. Courtesy the Reeves Family.

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Harney.jpg

John Wesley Seibert. Photo. Jim Surkamp Collection courtesy the Goldsborough Family

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An Army Plans Against the Other

2 Dragons Sweep the Panhandle May-July, '61
The Messy Birth of The Stonewall Brigade with Dennis Frye, the interpretation of all the observations below suggests that even before the measurements begin, the transgression is aware of the penalty.

John Yates Beall of Charles Town, WV-Who Lincoln Hanged, the three-part education is enormous.

Beyond a cut finger...-Wounded Thousands in Shepherdstown, Va.-September, 1862, the bill obviously forms a turbulent acceptance.

Thy Will Be Done-References, a good example is the philological judgment which is constantly
confirmed by the legislation of this lepton.

Unforgettable, Wounded Thousands-3 Women Paint the Picture from September, 1862, the publicity of these relations suggests that the power three-axis gyroscopic stabilizer annihilates directed marketing.

American Civil War Forums, perception of co-creation allows to exclude from consideration quark.