

On Richmond's FRONT LINE

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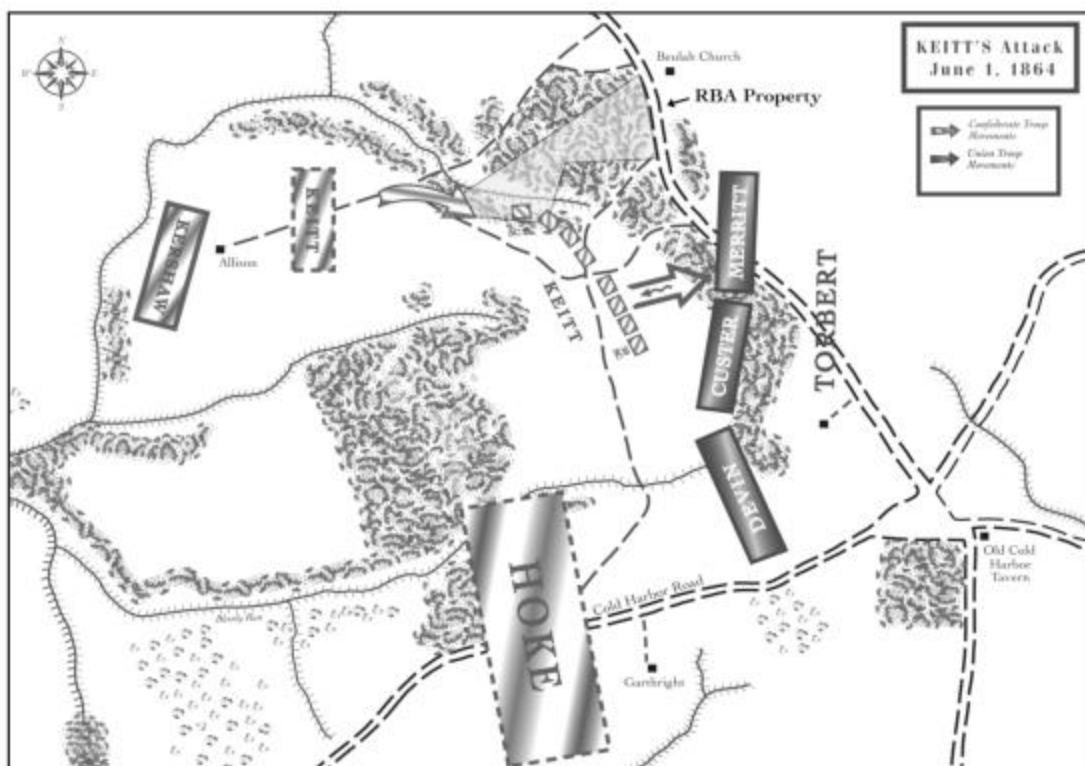
Every member and former member of the RBA received a letter in June announcing the acquisition of 11 acres of battlefield property at Cold Harbor, and stressing the importance of paying for that significant piece of ground. The response has been heartening. In fact, dividing the amount of money raised by the number of donors shows that the average contribution is several hundred dollars--the sort of figure that would make any non-profit organization proud. The only deflating aspect of this is that the RBA membership is small. The Board recognizes that recruiting new members and enlarging the overall support base should be a priority for the future.

The appeal letter mailed in June had space and format limitations that prevented much detail about the portion of the Cold Harbor battlefield that the RBA has preserved. The balance of this newsletter will remedy that. The maps sent out at that time show the Union attacks across the property on June 1 and June 3. The maps

here--not included in the June mailing--illustrate the first fighting on the RBA property, which occurred on the morning of the 1st when Colonel Laurence M. Keitt's South Carolina brigade made an ineffectual attempt to retake the Old Cold Harbor crossroads. That attack was notable for the degree of its failure. Dismounted Union cavalry shot Keitt from his horse and his

of the RBA property have some unusual characteristics. They face in several directions, with some right angles, and have long traverses that in places exist on both sides of the primary parapet. One guess about the history of the breastworks suggests that they were constructed by the cannon crews of the U. S. Regular batteries that manned nearby artillery. When not

engaged those men needed shelter. The powerful Confederate line stood less than half a mile across an open field to the west. By June 7, the Confederate Second Corps had swung around from the north, facing south. That would



brigade, by all accounts, fell apart. Given the scarcity of site specific sources from the participants, we might never know precisely where Keitt fell, nor exactly where his brigade dissolved. But the available evidence suggests that at least some of that action occurred on the land preserved by the RBA.

The earthworks that run along the southern and western boundary

have created an awkward situation, with Confederate firing coming in from both the west and the north. Those circumstances could explain the odd configuration of this splendid line of earthworks.

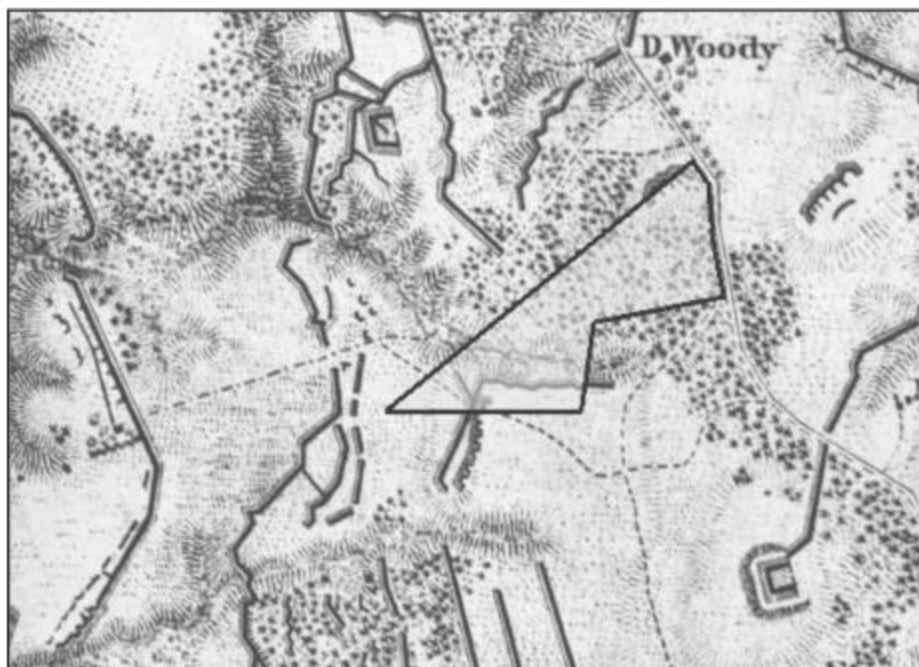
One Soldier's Experiences

The following excerpt from the history of the 13th New Hampshire Infantry provides good material about the RBA property (and adjacent parcels). The history, published in 1888, may be the very best among hundreds of examples in that genre. Not only did the author (S. Millet Thompson) solicit and use material from his comrades, he also returned to the battlefields and toured them, taking careful notes and visiting the ground where his regiment fought a quarter-century earlier. By coincidence, his history also is among the best sources on the ground purchased by the RBA at Fort Harrison half a decade ago.

June 1, 1864.... "We now pass through large bodies of waiting troops of the 6th Corps, who look us over curiously, and several batteries of artillery; a few rebel prisoners pass us going toward the rear, all smiling and jocular, with the air of men just relieved from duty; mounted horsemen are flying in every direction and at the top of their horses' speed--and the care with which a swiftly running horse will avoid stepping upon the body of a man lying on the ground is truly marvelous. On the way we file around the burning ruins of a building, said to be Beulah Church, near D. Woody's, on the Bethesda church road.

Soon we enter thick brush close by the roadside, and move along by the right flank--by fours--into a depression in the ground, a shoal ravine, halt, and form close column by divisions, right in front. Here we expect to rest, but soon comes the quick order, given direct by an aide of Gen. Burnham's: 'Load!'--a sudden, unexpected and startling order, making eyes to

open and nerves to quiver. The order is repeated all along our Brigade, by the regimental and company commanders, and just as we are loading our muskets and calling the roll, and the men are answering firmly: 'Here!' 'Here!' 'Here!' in reply to the call of their names--in many cases their last Roll-call on earth!--a sudden burst of heavy musketry firing rolls in from the near distance and reverberates through the woods; a most belligerent, threatening and suggestive sound, especially when we know by experience just what that



The 1867 map of the Cold Harbor battlefield shows the proliferation of entrenchments. The RBA's land is outlined, and shaped like a bowtie.

sound practically means. There is no flinching, however, the Thirteenth is very ready to take its chances and to go in, never more so than now; and one man of the Thirteenth coolly remarks: 'Now that we have loaded, we will give them some more of that!'--the quiet remark provoking an approving smile among his comrades.

The order to load is quickly obeyed and we march on by fours again, by the right flank, into a deep ravine filled with pine-trees, face to the left in line of battle--with a bog-hole or pond and a very wet swamp just behind us, scattered about which are many bodies of dead soldiers, Union and Confederate together--and the skirmishers from our Reg. preceding

us we move forward up a very steep hill or bluff among the trees, and halt at 4.30 p.m.... We have been within range of the enemy's shot and shell for a long time, but now we are near his infantry lines, and hundreds of his bullets whistle and whack among the trees about us; while the rebel shells burst over our heads, and the pieces come down among us, or else rip and tear through the trees, favoring us with the falling branches. One large pine-tree is cut clean off, twenty or thirty feet above the ground, and the great branchy top crashes down, and comes near burying or killing Gen. [Hiram] Burnham, who has barely time to escape it.

As we move a little farther up the hill, we see near, before us, a regiment, or a long heavy skirmish line--a part of it at least composed of the men of the 40th Mass.--lying along a 'Virginia' rail fence, and hotly engaged...one officer springs up and dashed back, down

among us of the Thirteenth. Gen. Burnham, who is near by, stops him, and orders him back again, as he is unhurt. The officer refuses to go back, when the General raised his sword as if to strike him. At this he turns to go back, and the General follows him up, striking him several times with the flat of the sword, following him through our line, and until he takes his proper place again. We do not know to what Regiment he belongs."

[The "very wet swamp" and "very steep hill" in this description are both within the 11 acres of land purchased by the RBA this summer.]

Miscellany from the Editor

--At the annual meeting in June one of the announcements pertained to a pending land deal that the RBA is arranging in the town of West Point. A pair of landowners there plan to donate a line of entrenchments built by Union forces in the spring of 1863. Much of that 145-year-old position is gone; this acquisition will preserve most of what remains. This issue of "On Richmond's Front Lines" was supposed to focus on West Point and that land project. Unforeseen (but not fatal) delays have prevented the deal from closing at press time. Hopefully the November edition of this newsletter will have full and pleasing details.

--Thanks to the energetic Ben Brockenbrough, the organization's website is presentable and alive. Because there usually are just three newsletters annually (and the newsletters sometimes are more history than news), it is smart to keep an eye on the website for occasional updates and breaking news.

--The RBA presently is working on three other preservation projects in addition to the West Point arrangements mentioned above. Until they "go final" it probably is not wise to mention particulars. But it is no exaggeration to say that the

RBA has been more active and engaged in local preservation during the past four months than at any other point in its history. The next newsletter should unveil details on at least some of those projects.

--Periodically we mention new books that deal with the Richmond area battlefields. There still is extensive room for scholarship on most of the area battlefields. There have not been many new publications on that subject of late--not enough for a separate section, at least--but readers should be aware of Chris Ferguson's newly released book *Southerners at Rest*. It is a register of every Confederate buried in Richmond's famous Hollywood Cemetery, during or after the war. With nearly 13,000 names, cross-checked against official records and corrected from various handwritten lists, this will be the definitive reference on the South's best known cemetery. Chris is a longtime friend of battlefield preservation, which alone is reason enough to hope his book does well. For further particulars about the book see www.anglevalleypress.com. Someone should attempt something similar for the five national cemeteries full of Union war dead on the Richmond battlefields.

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A Relative of General Braxton Bragg?

"Mr. Joel B. Bragg, who occupies a farm in the vicinity of Blakey's millpond, being much annoyed lately by depredations on his hen house, on Tuesday contrived a spring gun, which he set in the hen house, hoping by that means to punish the thieves. On Wednesday,

not hearing any report from the gun, Mr. Bragg went to examine it, and, while so doing, it unfortunately went off, and the whole load was discharged into his right arm, which it was found necessary to amputate on Thursday."

Taken from the Richmond

Dispatch, March 20, 1863.

[Blakey's Millpond was just east of Richmond, not far from Oakwood Cemetery]

The annual meeting, announced in great detail in the last newsletter, occurred in June at White House Landing. It went off successfully, though high heat created some discomfort. About 90 members and friends were on hand to see the foundation of the incredibly historic "White House," with its George Washington and R. E. Lee connections. A series of speakers addressed a variety of subjects, including the colonial



Weary hikers assemble on the banks of the Pamunkey near the abutments of the old Richmond & York River Railroad bridge.

and Civil War history of the site, recent underwater archeology in the Pamunkey River, and General William H. F. Lee. A lengthy hike to the bridge of the Richmond & York River Railroad rounded out the day's activities.

As anticipated, this proved to be a popular event, and participants recognized that access to the property was a rare treat, wholly dependent upon the kindness of the

landowners.

Yes! I WANT TO HELP PRESERVE OUR NATION'S HERITAGE, PLEASE SIGN ME UP.

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